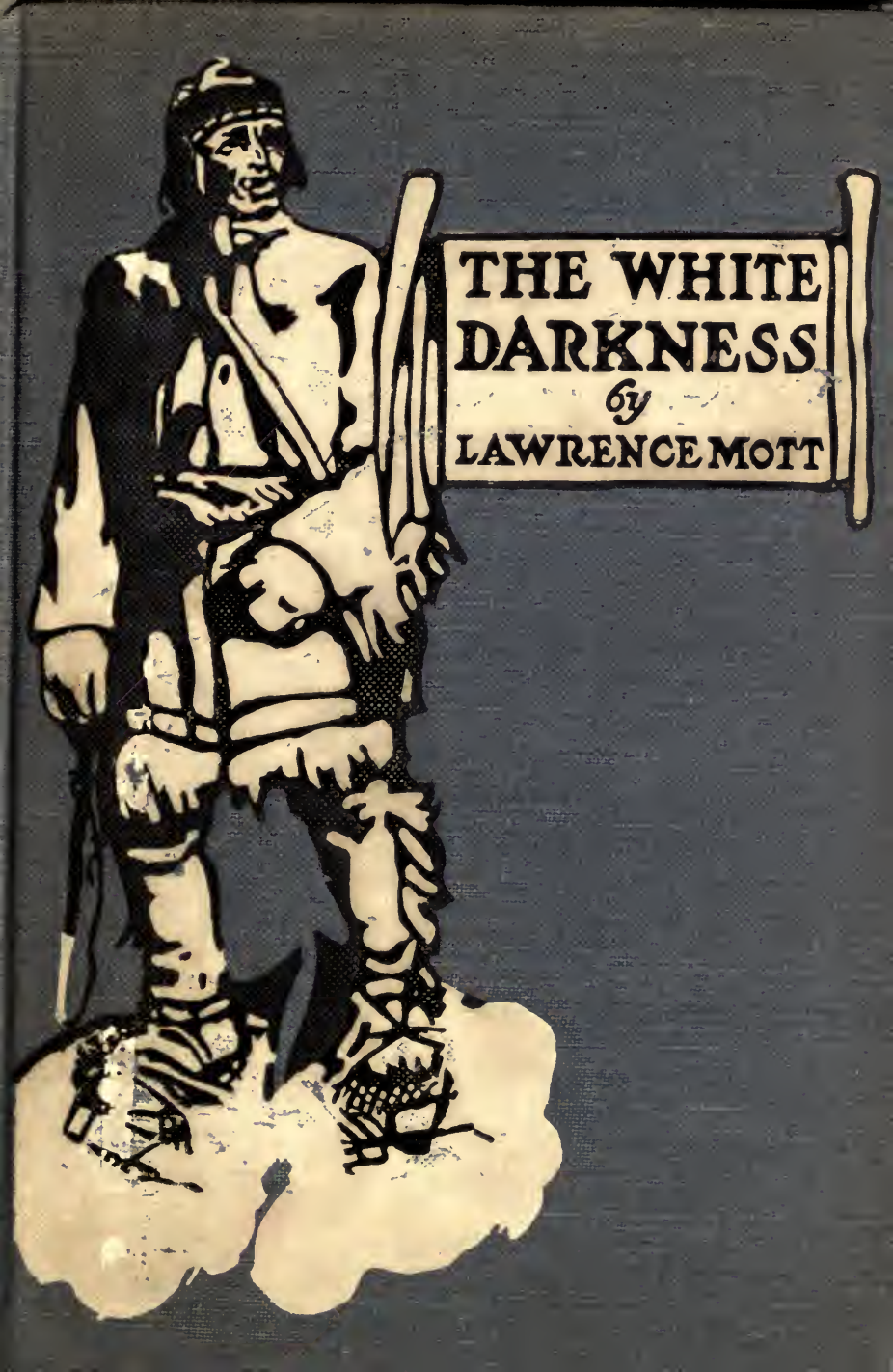
THE WHITE
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by
LAWRENCE MOTT

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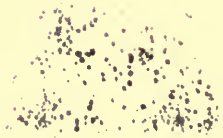

The White Darkness

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"Ha, Elsie!" he gasped

(See page 85.)

THE WHITE DARKNESS

AND OTHER STORIES OF THE GREAT NORTHWEST

BY

LAWRENCE MOTT

Author of "Jules of the Great Heart"

ILLUSTRATED BY

FRANK E. SCHOONOVER AND CYRUS CUNEO

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To

MY WIFE

These little tales as memories,
I dedicate to thee,
Of wand'ring days in summer breeze
All full of joy for me.
To thee I owe all thoughts I pen,
Take these as tribute small,
Let's strike the dear old trails again
To the North wind's sigh and call.

The White Darkness

The White Darkness

THE afternoon light faded gradually till the tall pines cast no shadows, and the white landscape was gray. Whistling faintly, the wind swayed the forest branches to and fro, now in long sweeps with strong puffs, then in short bowings. The leaden sky was dark and low, cold and repellent.

Laflin filled his pipe slowly at the door of the N. W. M. P. Post, Onion Lake, his home. "Looks like snow," he muttered, his eyes roaming over the long distances beyond the forests. Little by little the pipe was filled; he lighted a match. Puff-puff, "I don't suppose (puff) that Jake will (puff) get back to-night (puff-puff-puff). Anyhow, I'll have supper by'n'by and take a run over to the Store." He stood there smoking quietly. Then the flakes of white came; dropping one by one at first, then falling in silent quantities, finally coming down in eddying and pirouetting myriads. As he watched, they piled themselves on the wood heap, hid

the bright bit of the axe, settled on its handle, and clung damply to the shingles and logs of the cabin. "Wonder how far they come?" He looked up. Out of pale gray nothingness the big spots of white came in noiseless masses; appearing like magic from the oneness of the heavens, and, as he followed them, disappearing into the cold gray oneness that lay on the north. Always tumbling, always blending, the particles dropped in clouds. The wind had gone entirely; only the crisp, settling, seething sound of the flakes could be heard. He went into the cabin. A bright fire sent forth cheery snappings from a little stove, whose red-hot cover cast a sheen on the log ceiling. He lifted the cover from a pot; a burst of steam rose, billowed about the small interior, and vanished. Laflin stirred the contents. "Those beans are the hardest I ever saw!" The water boiled and bubbled with liquid hissings. He took down a frying-pan from its nail behind the stovepipe oven, put bacon and sliced potatoes in it and a bit of butter; it began to sizzle and cook at once. He was making his tea when the door opened and a tall, strong figure came in, snowshoes in hand.

"Bo' jou', bo' jou', Lafleen!"

"Hello, LaGrange; where are you bound?"

The trapper unwound his muffler, stuck the snowshoes in a corner and sat on the rough bench. "Me? Ah'm goin' longue way baim'-by; wan' talk leetle firs'!"

"Anything wrong?" Laflin asked, noting the sullen voice and the gleam of the deep-set blue-gray eyes.

"Mabbe ye-es, mabbe non," the French-Canadian answered hesitatingly.

The constable waited for him to go on, stirring and turning the bacon and potatoes the while.

"You know dat Gros Gorge an' ma femme gon' way?"

Laflin turned quickly. "No! When was this?"

Steadily and impassively the other answered: "Mabbe t'ree day h'ago, mabbe two day. Ah come f'om de trap lignes dees aftairenoon, fin' de cabane emptee, not'in' dere, onlee dees pair ol' snow-shoe!" He pointed to them contemptuously.

"But your wife maybe went to Tomah's, or to her father's house?"

The other laughed bitterly. "Ah mak' fin' h'out ev'w'ere *een post;* no dere! Som' de boy dey say dat she gon' weet Gros Gorge, dat sacre Métis!" The voice thrilled and shook with fury, but the huge body was quiet.

"I'm very sorry for you, LaGrange, but she's not worth having if that's the sort of thing she has done; and——"

The trapper leaped to his feet. "Ah no come for h'ask you eef she good for have or no! LaGrange he wan' you say w'at 'appen eef he shoot dose two!"

The constable stared at the powerful square face, the ominous flash of the eyes, and saw the clenched fists, whose muscles stood out like tautened ropes. "You can't do that, LaGrange, or I should have to arrest you, and murder's a bad charge."

The trapper stared at the other, still, save for the quick trembling of his nostrils. "An' ef you no can catch . . . me?"

Laflin chuckled. "Then you'd be safe; but we *would* get you, LaGrange, and you know it!"

The bacon was done; he put out a tin plate, cup and saucer on the tiny table, and began to eat, the Canadian watching him stolidly.

"Have a bite? Come on, now—forget that killing plan. I know it's damned hard, but you'll have to do it, LaGrange, that's sure!"

"No wan' for h'eat. Ah go! Bo' jou'!" He took up the snowshoes, slung the woolen muffler about his massive throat and went out into the snow without another word.

"He's hit hard," Laflin said aloud. "I always felt that he was too good for her." He ate on comfortably. When his meal was finished he cleaned away the remains, lighted the pipe again and took a look outside.

The night was clammy and raw, the air still laden with the tumbling snow that showed white in the candle-light that came from the open door. Down in a hollow the lights of the Hudson Bay Company's Post twinkled brightly through the trunks; now and then the sound of voices was wafted to him by the light draught. The heavens were black and forbidding.

"An ugly night by the look of it now," Laflin whispered, and turned. As he did so he heard the short, sharp breathing of dogs, and in an instant a sledge drew up in the circle of yellow light.

"Ah'm goin' fin' dose two," the muffled fig-

ure said that crouched on it, "an' Ah'm goin' keel w'en Ah fin': you no catch . . . me! Allez Marse!"

A few yelps, the whine of a whip thong, and the circle of light was empty. The constable stared, and listened to the fast fading swi-i-ish of the sledge-runners through the snow. They were gone!

"He won't find them, and if he does he won't dare anything beyond a fight. My, but it's cold!" and he went in.

He tried to read some old magazines that furnished the only literature the cabin boasted of, but somehow he could not focus his attention on the pages. Then he put out the candles, took off his heavy service boots, stretched himself comfortably between the long blankets and tried to sleep. No use. The more he tried the more wide awake he became.

"Why did that fool come and tell me his story? I feel that—that . . . damn it, I don't know what I feel," and he lighted up again.

He went to the door and listened. Nothing but the wind that crooned softly through the pine needles answered his unacknowledged quest for sound and lurking dread of something.

All night he sat up, troubled and wondering. He waited impatiently for daylight, going to the door often, then throwing himself on the bunk again.

"There's something wrong, and I know it!" he muttered, tossing restlessly. "Poor old La-Grange; it's pretty hard lines on a man when his eyes are nearly gone snow-blind working for that girl, and she plays this sort of a game."

He got up and walked the floor, sometimes throwing bits of wood into the stove. "What's the matter with me?" he asked himself angrily. "I suppose it's just sympathy, but it's uncomfortable."

"At last," he said, as, opening the door for the manyeth time, he saw the first faint streaks of daylight through the shrouds of drifting flakes. He watched the lightness grow. In solid mass the trunks stood, dark and shapeless; then, bit by bit, outline by outline, they stood away from each other, growing in breadth and depth till each was clear and defined. The branches crept into silhouette against the brightening sky, gray as ever, and ever belching snow. He boiled some tea, fried some caribou meat, warmed some bread and ate slowly. As he was

finishing, a ray of pallid sunlight stole timidly athwart the floor.

"A fine day after all!" Having quenched the fire, he took down his snowshoes and buckled on his side arms. "I'll have a look round toward Battleford; Father Lesbauts said that two hours in the bright sun would blind him for months!"

The snow was deep and heavy, clinging to his snowshoes with soggy weight and strength as he pushed on among the trees. Higher and higher the now open sun climbed, shedding warm rays that instilled in him a sense of power. The white surface offered a dazzling glare to his eyes; they cringed and squinted. At the end of the strip of woods began the Long Barren. Straight away it stretched before him, pale blue-white and chilling gray in the sun. Billions of frost points shimmered on the surface, all burning his eyes with their power and gleam. He pulled his fur cap well down. "Very bad glare to-day!" he muttered, and started across the apparently endless distance.

Click-clack, click-clack, sounded his snowshoes as they struck together, the noise muffled by the impeding snow. Hour after hour passed,

Laflin swinging in a great circle toward Battleford. Of a sudden he stopped. Far off, a mere speck against the whiteness of everything, was a figure—at least, he thought it so. He worked his way toward it, and at last distinguished a man, standing alone and motionless. He kept his eyes on him, fearing to lose the dark form if he looked away, so bright and strong was the glare. He drew closer.

"LaGrange! but where's his team?" he asked aloud.

The man was standing quiet, snowshoes on his feet, dog lash in his hand, his face turned toward the west. Unconsciously Laflin looked there too, and saw a larger spot, apparently motionless, in the near distance.

"L——" he started to call, but did not, and edged nearer. When he was quite close he understood. LaGrange was absolutely snow-blind. The tall figure stood, straining the sightless eyes to the west; the snow was disturbed about, as though in a struggle.

"I wonder if—Yes, by h——l, it must be! I'll see pretty quick." Laflin decided, and worked his way noiselessly past the blind man, keeping at some distance from him, so as to be

sure that he should not be heard. He hurried along then toward the far black spot, that was in the same place; striding on, he kept under the brow of a snow rise until he was close to the place; then he crept forward. Just over the top was a sledge and two people beside it—a man and a woman. The man was busily at work demolishing the remains of a sledge, whose bone runners lay on the snow by him; the woman stood waiting. A double team of dogs sat about, their tongues lolling and drool streaming to the softening snow under their feet.

"The devils! they've got his sledge and team away from him, and now they are going to leave him to die! Not if I know it, even if I can't arrest any one!" He drew his revolver, sneaked to the very top of the rise, then—"Arrêté!" he ordered.

The girl screamed, the man, Gros Gorge, flinching at the sight of the gun. Laflin scrambled to them. "I'll give you just one minute to start away from here; and if I ever see you again in Onion Lake Post I'll have you sent to Stony Mountain* for stealing a sledge; you understand?"

*The penitentiary of the Northwestern Provinces.

"Arrête!" he ordered

The half-breed (Métis) mumbled his willingness to do anything for "de Polees."

"Take your own dogs and sledge. GO!" Gros Gorge went, the dogs' feet stirring up clouds of snow-dust that sparkled in the sunlight. Laflin watched him out of sight to the westward. He turned to the girl. How did you get your husband's sledge?"

She began to cry.

"None of that! Speak up, or I arrest you!"

She looked at him with tear-dimmed brown eyes. "He fallen h'off w'en sledde turn ovaire een hole la bas."

"What were you doing there?"

She stammered and hesitated.

"Come, speak up!"

"Gros Gorge he loove me," she whimpered. "We no wan' for to keel LaGrange." She leaned forward. "Onlee tak' hees sledde."

"And leave him to die, you fiend! You know that LaGrange is snow-blind, and blind for your sake, working like a dog for the Company to give you a home and food!"

She whined and cried softly.

"I am going to take you to him; he loves you more than his life; and listen well to what

I say. I am going to tell him—never mind *what* I tell him, only obey me, or I will take you to Barracks. You know what that means?"

The girl nodded.

"And if I ever see anything like this again, I——"

"Non, non!" she pleaded; and the two started back for the lone figure. It came in sight soon, but not quite as it was when Laflin passed it. LaGrange was stumbling slowly about, wandering aimlessly over the dazzling Barren; groping weirdly with his hands, and muttering to himself.

"Holla, LaGrange!"

Hearing Laflin's voice, he stiffened and stood still.

"I've found your wife!"

"W'ere? w'ere?" he asked thickly.

"Why, she got lost out here on that long trap line of yours; I always told you it was too long for her to look after!"

"Go to him," Laflin whispered fiercely.

She went.

He put his great arms about her lithe figure. "Dieu merci! Dieu merci!" he groaned. "Ah'm loss' de team een dat hole down dere;

dey gon' ouest. Ah was comen'," he stuttered a moment—"Ah was comen' for lock de line, but my eye'hes dey go bad. Ah no can see now! Ah, Nanette, your ol' mari he h'ave sooch terrible drream 'bout you, but eet no trrue. Dieu merci! no trrue!" He wrapped his long, gaunt arms about her, and the tears came from the temporarily sightless eyes. "You tak' me home, Nanette, hein?"

Laflin nodded, glowering at her.

"Certaine, mon pauvre."

The three started, LaGrange holding tightly to the girl's hand, Laflin following. They came to the police cabin.

"What in the devil—?" began a figure in the doorway.

"It's all right, Jake. Nanette got lost, and LaGrange has gone snow-blind, just as Father Lesbauts said he would if he didn't take care."

The girl, leading the tall, helpless figure, moved on toward the group of houses in the valley.

"Don't forget," Laflin whispered as she passed; and she nodded slowly.

The two mounted police watched them down the path, the sun in its afternoon glory soften-

ing the outlines of the forest, and throwing the two departing figures into strong relief.

"She's young—may be all right yet," Laflin muttered as they disappeared.

"Who's young? what's young?" the other asked.

"Oh, nothing, nothing; I was thinking, that's all." And the two went into the cabin.

Jaquette

Jaquette

"WHY for he no come?"

Jaquette went to the door of the log house and listened. The forest stood about the little clearing, tall and silent. Here and there the bushy tops of the highest pines swayed and whispered uncertainly, and from beyond she heard the sound of running waters.

The girl was lithe and strong, and as she leaned against the board door, her brown eyes wandered keenly among the trees.

"Dat fonnee Toma no come," she muttered again.

Night crept slowly out of the east as she watched, and the fir turned blacker and sharper against the fading light in the skies. The surroundings were somber and still as the starlight reached the earth.

A rabbit hopped quietly from the underbrush; she could just see it moving the long, delicate ears inquiringly and nosing on the ground almost at her feet. She watched the

little animal unseeing, yet noting its every movement. Behind her the fire in a small stove threw yellow rays that were as streaks across the clearing, showing the white chips of wood and glinting on a bright axe.

"Hoo-hoo-a-a."

She looked up quickly, and, putting her hands to her lips, she answered, "Hoo-hoo-a," imitating the owl's cry. "He come ver' soon!" She laughed gayly. "Ah mak' soupé for heem; hee hongree v'en hee arriv'."

Singing, she bustled about the little interior, built up the fire, and placed a kettle of tea and a frying-pan full of deer-meat and salt pork in the flames. Then she went over to an oblong box in the corner, lifted a quilt-covered bundle, and rocked it in her arms, crooning gently to it.

"Bébé, petite bébette, le père, he come weed leetle present for toi to-mor', Noël!" The child was quiet, its tiny white face nestled against her rough jacket, its big solemn eyes looking up at her unblinkingly. Then they closed wearily, and Jaquette put the little one back in the box, covering it carefully with the tattered but clean quilt of many patches and colors.

The meat sizzled, sending up vapors that

filled the room with their suggestion of hunger, the pork sputtered, and the flying drops hissed angrily on the dull red surface of the stove.

Jaquette turned the venison, then she lighted a candle. The feeble flame illumined everything vaguely. Over by a bough bed a rifle was supported by two forked sticks, and some snowshoes hung above it, their hoops white and gracefully curved. A few clothes dangled on pegs by the rough table, and beneath them a pile of light-weight steel traps showed black, their jagged teeth clenched, and their chains twisted and tangled on the floor.

The girl put two heavy china cups on the table—they were cracked and had no handles; two tin plates were already there; these, with three odd knives and one fork with bent prongs, constituted the arrangements of the table for supper. From a canvas bag she drew out a soggy loaf of bread, and from behind it a small jug of molasses and a few potatoes.

"He mus' be tout près; dat taim he call was comen' h'ovaire the Beeg Montaigne, certainement," she whispered, and went to the door again.

It had begun to snow, and a soft, cold wind

moved the silent branches restlessly. Great white flakes drifted quiet and chill through the darkness and settled with audible crispness on everything. The stars had disappeared; the skies were black and low to the earth. The wind increased slowly from a faint murmur to a droning moan that shook the forest, causing it to creak and complain as its branches swayed violently to and fro. The ghostlike bits whirled and eddied about, and melted in the girl's hair, trickling over her face as she stood waiting, straining her senses to hear. Nothing but the shrill sounds of the storm answered her. She went out into the clearing and over to the dark edges of the trees.

"Ah hear heem," she began, when:

"Hoo-hoo-a-ar" sounded harshly over her head from the impenetrable blackness of a tall fir. She staggered a moment.

"Bon Dieu! dat no Toma," she muttered weakly.

"Hoo-hoo-a!" was her answer; then an instant's flapping, and the owl was gone.

She went back to the hut slowly, while the snow, clustering upon her, soaked its clammy way to her throat and breast. She almost fell

in the little interior, and sank wearily on the bough bed.

"Toma—Toma," she whispered, rocking nervously back and forth, while the gale screamed in the surrounding forests and the snow hurtled itself, piling up in white masses about the logs.

The fire in the stove dimmed and sank, till only red glows peeped from the cracks in the door and draught-holes as she sat waiting. Then from the box in the corner came a fretting cry that changed into a shrill wail.

Jaquette was instantly beside it and rocked the little bundle, humming softly. Loud and incessant the voice sounded, and then the child coughed raspingly. She twisted some rags into a pitiful imitation of a doll and gave it to the little one, but the thin hands pushed it away, and the cough came more often, accompanied by a hoarse rattle and wheezing. Holding the child on one arm, Jaquette threw some wood on the dying fire, and, bending low, looked closely at the small face in her arms. By the growing, dancing light she saw the flush on the cheeks, and the solemn eyes glittered strangely while the hands clasped and unclasped spasmodically.

"Bon Dieu, Bébette she have la fièvre d'hiver [winter fever]," the girl said, with choking sobs, and great tears dropped on the quilt of many colors. "W'at Ah do, O Sainte Vierge—w'at Ah do?" She threw up her head wildly.

Outside, the storm roared and yowled, and the driving white beat against the little hut with stinging strength.

"Ah have notting for geef to her—notting," she whispered, her eyes traveling over the bare furnishings and empty shelves. "Notting!" she breathed, as the tears trickled over her face steadily.

The child shivered against her body, then broke out in more violent coughings.

"Eet fef'ten mile to Beau Rivage; dere's docteur dere las' wic'; mabbe he dere now. Ah go an' tak' Bébette," she decided, and put the child down by the heat while she hurriedly pulled on a fur cap of Toma's and threw a long caribou coat over herself.

"Toma he no know w'ere Ah gon'," she muttered, and hunted about, at last finding an old liniment bottle. This she put in the box crib on the rough pillow.

"He know by dat Bébette seeck," and, taking

up the child again, she wrapped the quilt about it securely and opened the door. A howling blast of wind rushed in, carrying myriads of snow particles that struck her face and caused her to gasp and catch her breath.

"Mus' tak' snowshoe." She went back, pulled down a pair, slung them over her shoulder, and went out into the darkness and sleeting white, shutting the door after her.

The tearing gale pushed her here and there as she started, but with head bent forward and the child protected as well as possible by her arms and the caribou coat, she forced her way ahead bravely. In a few moments the hut was gone in the blackness behind, and before her the trail to the settlement showed vague and bewildering, as clouds of snow billowed across it in great freezing drifts, sometimes hiding it entirely. The trees moaned and creaked eerily, rubbing together and squeaking with sounds that pierced the roaring of the pines and suggested the Windigos of the Storm.

The snow grew deeper at each step, till finally it reached her knees and chilled them through and through; then she struggled with the snowshoe thongs, lashing them about her ankles as

well as she could with one hand, and pushed on. The way led across a mile of lake; the ice was black and hard, but the shrieking wind tore at her dress while the snow climbed in under it and stung icily, then, melting, froze.

"Mus' go—*mus'* go!" the girl repeated over and over again, fighting her way, and pausing often for breath.

She could feel the coughings at her breast, though the arm that held the child was stiff and numbed.

When almost at the black forest line again, she saw a dark figure coming toward her. In a moment it was at her side.

"Who ees——" began a deep voice.

"Toma!" she cried, holding out the bundle in her arms. Bé——"

The big man gripped her arm and dragged her face to his.

"Dos poleece, dey aftaire me for keel Etienne!"

"Ah—h!" she cried, weakly.

"You rememb' dat taim Ah keel heem, w'en he go for to mak' bad t'ing on you?" the man shouted, to make himself heard above the hissing of the snow and howling of the wind.

Jaquette nodded.

"Dos poleece dey say dat Ah do dat, an' dey aftaire me by dam' now! You look for me?" and he laughed happily. "Ah was to have to go roun', chérie. You go back queeck you can, mak' hide dat Etienne his gun; eef de poleece dey fin' dat at hut, eet feenesh for me. Ah come back on t'ree call du hibou w'en dey gon'. Au r'voir!" And Toma disappeared, wrapped instantly in the shifting masses of flying snow.

The girl strangled in her agony.

"Toma!—Toma!" she called then, and screamed, "De bébé!—shee seeck!"

Nothing but storm sounds answered her, while the drift piled on her snowshoes, threatening to bury them.

"Poleece! Poleece keel Toma," she mumbled, brokenly, swaying with the wind—"poleece keel Toma!"

Keel! The gale seemed thunder in her ears. She looked in the direction he had gone, and sought to pierce the blinding, biting hurtleclouds of snow, while the child coughed and shook under its covers. Then her head turned toward the back trail, and from it to the settlement path, and she hesitated.

"Bébette, Toma — Bébette, Toma," she moaned, then turned fiercely on her tracks and started back.

She bent her head over the form in her arms, great sobs quivering her body.

"Adieu, Bébette, mon Bébé! Your faddaire he say go back for sauf his laif, an' Ah go!"

The strength of the hurricane wind hurried her on, pushing her ahead of it. She stumbled forward, unconsciously lifting her snowshoes and mechanically putting them down again till she came to the hut. She fell against the door and dragged herself inside. With feverish hands she unwound the child and put it in the box; then she leaped for the rifle, snatched it from its rest of crotched sticks, ran to the door and out into the storm again, across the clearing, into the woods, till she came to a little brook. The swift water had not frozen, and it gurgled cold and repellent at her feet. Just below the ice was thick, and she pushed the rifle far under the hard surface, dipping her arm to the shoulder, so as to get the gun absolutely out of sight.

"Bébé!" she whispered, when she came to their home again, lifting the child—"Bébé!"

No answer. The little figure lay stiff in her arms, quiet.

"Bébette!" she cried, and shook it gently, peering at the white face; then she understood.

For a time the girl stood like a statue in the cold room. At last, dry-eyed, but with an awful tightening at the heart, she laid the child slowly in its box, and pulled the ragged quilt over it with all a mother's tenderness, and turned away, seeing nothing, heeding nothing, knowing nothing.

The hours passed on, pain-laden and storm-fraught, till a faint gray light grew timidly outside. Haggard and witless, Jaquette went to the door, propping her aching body against it.

"De poleece, dey come!" she murmured, forcing her brain to action as she heard voices. They ceased, and from the gloom of the forest five men on horses came in single file to the hut.

"Hello, Jaquette!" one of them called. "Where is Toma?"

She swallowed hard and bit her lip to the blood.

"He gon' mak' trap on Lac des Pluies."

"H'm!" grunted another, "gon' mak' trap,

hein? W'en?" The voice was crafty and suspicious.

The girl thought quickly now.

"Dis night he gon', mabbe seex hour."

"That makes it right, Ay-ma-te; stop growling. We saw Toma at the settlement yesterday —you know!" The first man tethered his horse to a log and blanketed him as he spoke.

"Ai-hai!" growled the Indian. It was an Indian who questioned Toma's absence. "You Englese know all t'ing, Ma-tche-man-itou! Ah no t'ink Toma he gon'!"

"Look for yourself, ye Indian—go on, look then!" and another member of the police cursed. "Damn ye, go look! I'm goin' to warm me; kin we, Jaquit?"

The girl nodded, and stood aside as the five tramped in. The Indian walked softly about while the others built up the dead fire.

"Ha!" he called, when he found the crotched sticks the rifle had rested on. "De gun he 'way! dat certaine. *Who* gun stay dere?" he asked, frowning at the girl.

"No gun," she answered, steadily; "speare for de saumon, so," and she picked up a long salmon-spear and hung it on the sticks.

"H—m!" The big Indian grumbled, and moved up to the fast-reddening stove. The Northwest Police, for the five were of that corps, sat around the heat.

"De horse col'?" Jaquette asked, looking out. The five horses stood clustered together, their tails to the storm, their heads sunk low; the long manes crackled sharply under the ice-hung outer hairs, while the heavy stirrups swung to and fro.

The dull-blue blankets flapped wildly in the wind, and the growing light showed globules of white on the horses' lips and frozen bits on their fetlocks. The ugly carbine-butts were coated with frost, and the revolver-holsters showed black and damp. The snow fell more slowly and drifted unevenly on everything.

"Ah 'ope la neige she no stop teel my trac' couvert," the girl whispered to herself, and turned as the Englishman spoke.

"How's the kid?"

As answer, she went over to the box and pulled aside the quilt. "Bébette dead las' night," she announced, abruptly.

"Good God!" and the man sprang to his feet. "No, Jaquette—not dead?"

The mother moved her head affirmatively and let the cover fall on the tiny face, bursting into dry shakings of her shoulders. The men took off their caps in awe, and a deep silence settled on the interior.

"Jaquette, I'm sorry," the Englishman said then, in low tones. "God bless and keep you in your trouble and pain. Come on, men!" he said to the others.

They rose.

"'Ow 'bout Toma? Hee keel Etienne!" The Indian looked round searchingly.

"Ye didn't find Etienne's gun, did ye? An' 'tan't here ef ye didn't find it. *He* didn't kill him. Come on!" another hissed, and the five passed out, unblanketed their horses, mounted, and rode away, the dull champing of bits and thick plod-plod of horses' feet sounding heavy on the snowy air.

Jaquette watched them go from the clearing, saw them disappear in the half-light of the forest trunks, and waited for two hours, while the thin light grew into full day and the snow-clouds parted, letting through warm, soft rays of the climbing sun. The air was still.

Weakly she put her hands to her mouth.

"Hoo-hoo-a!" she called three times, and listened. From a distance came the answer, "Hoo-hoo-a!" and she closed her eyes.

Then two arms lifted her.

"We fool dose poleece, hein, chérie?" a strong voice waked her. "An' Bébette? Ah go mak' kees!" and Toma went over to the box. "O Dieu!" he stuttered, and looked at his wife.

Jaquette nodded very slowly. "For you dees, Toma—for you!" and she told him.

He put his strong hands over his face; then he drew from his shirt a little wax doll and a tin whistle and laid them reverently on the little form.

"Dose for you!" he whispered huskily.

The girl went to him, and they stood in silence while the sunlight crept in beams of white across the log floor.

"Mabbe som'taim' le bon Dieu He geef to us 'nodder Bébette," Toma whispered.

"Mabbe," she answered, and laid her head on his great shoulder—"mabbe."

The Silver Fox

The Silver Fox

WHEN the days were short and the forest bare of leaves; when autumnal colors had gone, leaving brown trunks and the dark green pines and firs; when the caribou called hoarsely on the barren lands and the beaver worked to get in their winter supply, then Sebat gathered the few steel traps he had, packed some food, his blanket and two shirts around them, slung the whole on his axe-handle, tossed the bundle to his shoulder, picked up his carbine and started from Fort à la Corne for Lac le Rouge through the wilderness.

The day was dark and a raw wind muttered among the tall tops.

"Hm!" he snorted as he traveled rapidly on. "Dat facteur Daniele he t'ink he h'ave som't'ing for not'ing. Ah goin' see dat Murchee-son h'at le Rouge, mabbe so he mor' honorable."

Around windfalls, down ravines, up the rough river beaches, over low mountain runs,

past lakes and the dead water stretches of streams, he plodded on.

Always the wind mourned and the forest was deserted save for a hurrying rabbit now and then and sometimes a fleeting glimpse that he got of a caribou, its thudding feet rustling in the depths of frosted leaves. He camped that night near the Hudson Bay Post at Green Lake, but he did not go in there because he knew that the factor was short of trappers and would try to make him stay.

"De troubl' weet dees Compagnie," he whispered as he boiled some tea by the little fire, "ees dat les facteurs dey fighten' too much wan noddaire for mak' beeges' lot monnaie; d'Indians no get 'nough for h'eat an' die. Sacrée," he spoke aloud in his vehemence, "dey no goin' starrve Sebat, dat sure!" and he ate his supper. Tiny snowflakes dropped into the firelight as he finished.

"Snow? she come earlee dees saison," and he laid on a few more boughs over his one-man lean-to. Soon he was asleep and the night passed on, cold and dismal. The snow ceased and the wind came stronger and stronger, shrilling in the hemlocks with long-drawn sounds.

By the first signs of light Sebat had his fire going again, and when the frugal breakfast was over he shouldered his load and went on. Late in the afternoon of the next day he stopped suddenly, while passing through a muskeg swamp.

"Silvare fox?" and he got down on his knees by a log that had fallen outward from the timber. He searched the bark keenly.

"Ha!" He carefully drew a long gray hair from the rough edges.

"Ha—ha! by diable, dat wan nombair wan silvaire fox," he muttered. "Dat feller mus' be leeven clos'. S'posen' ovaire dere een dat spleet rock, hein?" Then he answered his own questions.

"Certain! Ah goin' get dat fine animal leetle mor' late, w'en snow deep!"

At dusk he reached the Company's Post at Lac le Rouge.

"Bo' jou', bo' jou', Michele," he said, pushing open the door of a little log house.

The man looked up startled. "Eh? Ben dat you, Sebat! Ah t'ink you down à la Corne."

"Jus' so, but Ah no lak' de facteur; Ah'm

comen' le Rouge for trappen' dees wintare; for mek beeg lot monnaie, go see Annette and dose petits Ah got," and he chuckled. "Par Dieu, you know Ah got seez! T'ree garçons, an' t'ree filles!"

The other laughed.

"Dat all ver' bon w'en you got strong han's for worrk; s'posen' you seek, w'at happens?"

"Ah dunno," Sebat answered, and his face sank; then brightened, "Ah'm strong feller manee year yet!"

Michele Poitrin lighted his pipe.

"You get suppaire ef you want, hein?"

They talked long, for they were old friends; then Sebat went to the store.

"Bo' jou', M'sieu Murcheeson."

The factor, at his desk behind the counter, nodded, and Sebat glanced about the white-washed and raftered interior.

A few "outside" trappers, one or two Canadians and a lot of Indians squatted and stood round, talking in low, soft voices. The air was thick with the reek of pipes; candles lighted the scene.

Murchison looked up: "What is't ye'r wantin'?"

Sebat gazed at the little Scotchman from his towering height.

"Ah'm t'inkin' mak' hunt for you dees wintaire."

"Trap an' welcome," Murchison chuckled; then in a whisper to the clerk, "We'll have the grreatest lot o' skins ever come out the deestrict this year! They're all flockin' to us." His subordinate acquiesced wearily and continued to add rows of small figures that danced before his eyes as the candle in front of him guttered and wavered.

"D'ye want some grub?"

"Ai-hai" (yes). Sebat walked over to the counter and brought his fist down with a crackling thump.

"An Ah wan' grub at de 'line' cost! Ha—ha! You see Sebat he know w'at de cost ees at de 'line,' an' w'at dey geef for skeens dere aussi."

The factor stared. The store was silent—then Murchison's eyes narrowed, but he turned to his desk without further remark.

"H'm!" Sebat snorted again, and went out. "Dat Murcheeson ees 'fraid h'of me!" he announced proudly, entering Michele's hut.

"You bessis tak' care h'of dat mans! He

h'ave wan hearrt lak'——" Michele took up a stone hammer and slammed it on the floor—"dat."

Sebat laughed. "Ah don' t'ink he goin' hurrt me!" and the two rolled up in their blankets on the little bough beds.

Outside, dogs yowled singly and in unison; the long-drawn wails echoing and re-echoing fainter and fainter in the silent forests. They listened to their own voices, then yelped on.

The waters of the lake rolled noiselessly; sometimes breaking on the shingle with chill whisperings; then curling liquidly, lapping one another. Across from the Post islands stood out black and lonely, only their outlines visible in the darkness.

As the first signs of day came, pale green and scarlet in the east, the Post was awake. After breakfast Sebat went over to the store again.

"Geef me twent pound flour, t'ree pound tea, ten pound porrk an' wan pound salt!"

The clerk weighed each article and put the amount in his ledger. "Sebat Duval four dollars and twelve cents." The voice was apathetic and dull.

"How dat?"

"Those are our prices! Take it—or leave it!"

The big trapper started to push the food back, thought better of it and tucked the packages under his arms.

"You goin' see!" he called over his shoulder, "Ah'm no Indian for mak' starrve, par Dieu!"

The clerk paid no attention, and Sebat went back to Michele's.

"Ah'm goin' by Churcheel Riviere to-day," he said, packing his supplies and outfit.

"W'at for dere?"

Sebat looked about the yard. "Beeg lot fur la bas," he whispered, "mabbe Ah get—den h'ave plent' monnaie, go home, see Annette an' de leetle wans."

"B'en, au'woir," Michele called as Sebat started, snowshoes, axe, traps, food, blankets in a firm pack-load on his back, tump line over his forehead. He waved his hand, and disappeared among the hemlock on the lake trail.

Every two hours or so he would rest, either propping his heavy load on a high-fallen tree, or slipping it to the ground; then he would smoke, his eyes coursing through the forest the

while, noting everything. He saw the shuffling, padded track of a bear, and noted that the footprints were far apart.

"He goin' fast, looken' for place sleep wintaire," he muttered. On a ridge he was crossing later he found a moose trail leading to the river beyond; he followed it, and crossed the stream at a shallow ford.

"De moose dey know w'ere good place," he chuckled as he waded to his knees..

At noon the next day he reached the spot he wished to camp on, at Churchill River, and he soon had a strong lean-to built.

The following weeks were spent in setting traps, and collecting his fur, that was not plentiful, as luck seemed against him. Then he had no more cartridges or food and he went back to the Post. Michele was away trapping; so were nearly all the Indians, save for a few decrepit old men and squaws that sewed moccasins and made snowshoes.

He took his fur to the factor. Twelve beaver, seven sable, three red fox, two sable, one marten, five mink and eighteen muskrat.

"Eighteen dollars," Murchison said abruptly, examining the skins.

"Non!" Sebat shouted. "For'-five dollaires!"

The Scotchman looked at him.

"Ye'r crazy, mon," he said quietly.

"Mabbe Ah'm crazee, but you no get dose skeens les dan w'at Ah say!"

"Take 'em away then, and get out my store."

"Ah wan' grub!"

"So that's it, is't? Ye want this and that and t'other for naething! Get out, I tell ye!"

Murchison kept three beaver and a marten, the best of the lot.

"That's for the grub ye got afore."

"By diable, down h'at de 'line' dey geef——"

"I don't care what they give at the line! I'm running this place, and what I say stands, d'ye hear?"

Sullenly Sebat took the other skins and went away.

By dint of coaxing and threatening he got a little flour here, some tea there, thus eking out enough food for a two weeks' hunt. It was late; he slept that night in Michele's hut. The next morning the ground was deep with snow; he put on the caribou-thonged snowshoes and started for the silver fox.

The way was long and slow, the traveling hard, and the cold bitter in its strength. The white surfaces were indented by tracks, even and stretching away somberly into the depths of the trees.

Sebat came at last to the muskeg swamp and built his camp. He ate sparingly, then slept by starts while another winter's night passed, the moon shining mystically on the white of the north and creating deep, black shadows.

As he slept there came a fox by the lean-to. It stooped, seeing the embers of the fire, and stood there, motionless, head lifted, dainty pointed ears thrown forward inquiringly; its silvered coat reflecting the light rays that crept through the spruce branches above. The fox sniffed high, then low and vanished noiselessly.

"Hah! Fox, by gar!" Sebat said next morning when he started out to set his traps, seeing the track.

All day he worked. Down by the frozen stream he put out three "steels," cunningly hidden by snow that looked as if it had fallen naturally. This he did by gathering it on boughs, and tossing it in the air over the trap; the bait lay tempting on top.

In other places he put dead-falls for marten and sable, and at the last took off the tump line (that he used for a belt), sprung down a sturdy young birch, and fixed a noose on a caribou trail. As he shuffled home, his snowshoes clinking sharply, he talked aloud.

"Dat Murcheeson? Sacrée, he wan voleur! He don' get my fur fur h'eighteen dollaires! B'en non!"

The sound of his voice was deadened by the snow-laden branches.

Day after day he went to his traps, and always the same result—nothing.

Sometimes the bait was stolen (this was bad as he did not have any to spare); again the traps were sprung, but nobody was between the sharp jaws. His food grew lower and lower; then he ate but once a day, saving his scanty supply.

"Mus' go back to-mor'," he whispered mournfully. A thought came. He took off his fur cap.

"Bon Dieu, dees pauv'r Sebat h'ave not'ing, onlee Annette an' seex child'en! He wan' for go see dem, an' mus' catch dat silvaire fox for to go dere." Satisfied he slept.

The morning dawned red and calm, with the sting of frost and the silence of daylight. As soon as he could see, Sebat went the mile to the muskeg swamp for the last time. He looked, rubbed his eyes, and stared. A few yards from the timber edge was a dark body; attached to one of its hind legs a steel trap, chain and clog.

"De silvaire fox!" he cried and ran out. It was stiffened and straight—was the lithe form; glossy and perfect its coat, each hair tipped with silver points, the under mass pure gray and of one tone. The eyes were half closed and glassy, frozen in their sockets. Almost in awe at its beauty, Sebat released the jaws; the trap clinked to the light crust. He picked up the body and ran like mad to camp; sat down, the fox in his arms, crooning like a child.

"Ah goin' see Annette, Ah goin' see Annette; dey geef me hund'er dollaires for dees," he repeated over and over again.

Realizing that he had no food he packed his load and started for the Post again, carrying the fox always.

At dark he reached the store, hungry, tired, snowshoe sore, but *so* happy and triumphant.

"How dat, M'sieu Murcheeson?" he asked,

carefully putting the silver fox on the counter and smoothing the glorious coat that shone, even in the candle-light.

The factor looked carelessly, then a gleam of greed flitted across his face. He examined thoroughly.

"Thirty dollars," he said, and put out his hand to take the fox.

Sebat seemed not to understand; he gazed at the Scotchman in astonishment.

"T'irt' dollaires?" he asked in sing-song voice.

"Aye, mon, and a guid price, too!"

The trapper awoke to the bitter disappointment. He struck fiercely at the hand that was drawing the fox, *his* Silver Gray for Annette, from him, and the factor winced. All the fury of the French blood boiled out, and Sebat cursed the Company and the factor.

"You steal f'm de Indians, dey starrve an' you get deir monnaie. Ah'm goin' tak' dees to de 'line' an' get hund'er dollaires! You—you—you—Ah—sacrée," he snarled, seized the fox and darted out.

He ran headlong to Michele's. It was dark in the hut; he strode in, and stood there pant-

ing, listening to the violent surging of his heart. Silence—stillness everywhere, and he was hungry and tired. He hid the fox under a bunk, wrapping it in his jacket, and went back to the factor.

"Geef me for h'eat, for go to 'line,' Ah geef you all dose skeens Ah have."

Murchison cursed him. "Go to the line and be damned to ye, ye French cur! Ye'll get naething here!"

Sebat went.

From tepee to tepee he tried to obtain enough food for the two hundred mile trip, but everywhere there was some excuse. He realized then that the factor had ordered it so among the Indians, and that they dared not disobey.

In Michele's home he found an old crust of bread, hard as wood, but it was food, and he gnawed eagerly.

"Par Dieu, Ah'm goin' 'line' jus' same! Ah'm strrong 'nough for go t'ree day hongree!"

Fox under his arm, snowshoes on his feet, he started on the trail. The night was black, and snow clouds hung heavy and low.

He traveled on relentlessly, though the thongs wore into his ankles and his body craved

nourishment and rest. Daylight came, grew and broadened, as he was crossing a long barren; then it began to snow. Faster and faster, thicker and thicker came the flakes, deadening the sound of his snowshoes, clogging the swing of his stride; but he pushed on, shifting the fox from arm to arm.

Of a sudden he looked up and saw a high ridge before him. "Dees no de way," he muttered and swung to the left.

On and on and on he traveled, head low to the blinding snow that swept across the open in whirling clouds, urged by the strong wind. To the right, then to the left, he struggled. At last he knew that he was lost, and he stood still.

Crisply the snow settled about him, lonely the wind yowled and sirened across the wastes. Daylight was nearly gone. He was weak and trembling. Far in the distance, only intermittently visible through the shifting white, was a hill.

"Ah go dere, mabbe see w'ere Ah'm goin'," he muttered hoarsely.

Dragging his feet along, he fought his way; stumbling, slipping, he tried to reach the top—and fell. He rose slowly, worked his way a lit-

tle farther and fell again. Up, more painfully, and on. Another fall, the snow cutting his face and trickling over his throat. On one hand and knees now, the silver-gray fox weakly clasped to his body, he strove to reach the top of the rise.

A sense of warmth, of unutterable comfort, came over him.

"Ah'm tire'," he whispered, as he felt the drowsiness creep on his giant frame; and he lay still.

"Ah mus' go, Ah *mus'* go!" he gasped, and tried to move; but the peace and luxurious rest his body felt was too great and his brain could enforce no action.

"Ah'm goin' die here—die ici—jus' here alon'!"

He dragged the fox to his face. The fur felt warm and soft.

"Annette—Annette," he murmured, "so manee, manee leetle chil—d'n!"

The snow fell seething on the still figure; covering it lightly at first, then blending its shape with the whiteness of everything. Finally the place was level with the rest. The wind shrieked spasmodically and the white clouds tossed and drifted.

Love in the Wilderness

Love in the Wilderness

I

"WHERE *is* Chictou?" Constable Clyde, of the R. N. W. M. Police, asked the girl for the third time.

She was quick-witted and clever, this half-breed woman of the North. Tossing her small head derisively—"Gon' mabbe somew'ere, Ah tol' to you!"

The Constable seated himself on the edge of the rough table, one leg swinging, the drip of the snow-water falling from the moccasin in a little stream to the floor. "Come, come, Nanon; there's no use in lying about it. He's been here *to-day!*"

"How you—?" she began.

"A—ah!" He leaned forward quickly. "He *has* been here, then!" He chuckled softly.

The girl's eyes flamed, but she controlled herself, humming a French-Canadian voyageur's song. Her voice was soft, and the cadence filled

the interior of the log cabin with gentle, lulling effect.

Clyde listened, his body tired from long miles by snowshoes on the trail of Chictou Bènard, "wanted" for robbing the Hudson Bay Company's Store at Spirit River. The track had led straight to the cabin, fresh made that morning; Clyde knew it; now he sought further information. "Do you remember when we used to dance together at Dunvegan?"

She looked at him sharply. "Si, Ah 'membaire."

Silence then, broken only by the snow that fell slowly through the pine and fir outside, dropping with a faint, almost inaudible seething.

The half light showed a clean, square room with a big bunk of boughs in one corner, triangular fireplace in another; old clothes, traps, unfinished snowshoes, caribou hides and a few bearskins filling up the rest of the floor-space under the low eaves. Clyde's leg swung on, the water dropping now. "Look here, Nanon," and he went toward her, "it doesn't mean much to Chictou—six months at the most, and I've *got* to find him. I *will* too!" he added.

"Seex mois! An' who goin' tak' care de me dose taimes, hein?"

"You can get somebody to come up with you; any of the boys would be glad to," he answered, unthinkingly.

"Beas'! Diable!" she screamed at him, quivering.

Clyde was startled for an instant. "I'm sorry, Nanon; I didn't know you cared so much for him."

The girl drew herself up in her tanned caribou shirt and skirt, till her black hair mingled with the gloom overhead, so it seemed to the Constable. "Et no for you, Poleec', to mak' t'ink t'all 'bout Chictou an' me! Ve très good liv' wid'out you t'ink!"

Night settled slowly on the vast forests, causing shapes to vanish, outlines that were against the sky only remaining. Snow drifted more slowly from the heavens, the flakes great, white, and damp, heavy with the moisture of the lower air.

"Since you won't save him a long, hard trail trying to dodge *me,* I'll have to——"

"Bo' jou', petite! De Poleec' no fin'——"

The great gaunt figure in the doorway stopped, seeing the Constable.

Clyde recognized his man. The girl tried to hold him, but he tore from her, drawing his revolver. "Halt!" The flitting shadow of a form vanishing among the trees answered him. He fired two shots.

The girl laughed hysterically as the Constable rushed into the night. She leaned against the doorway, her hands clenched tightly. "Allez, Chic'! *Allez*—queeck! Ah, mon Dieu!" The tones, loud and piercing because of her fear, vibrated in the dark mass of branches, as though the forest grudgingly permitted them a tortuous path in its labyrinth of needles.

Solemn and still was the night; the lonely, far-away hoo-hoo-hooo of an owl floated with indescribable suggestion of the absolute wilderness; and from the barren beyond the shrill yelping of foxes at play came sharply. The snowfall ceased as she waited, the flakes diminishing in numbers till but a few pirouetted to earth. No more came then; and the breathless silence of a mid-winter snow-night was over everything.

"Cr-ang!"

She shivered when the faint report struck on

her ears. Very distant it was, but it brought visions of what might be, and she began to cry. Softly at first the tears draggled down her face. Then, as no further sound came, she cried bitterly, her sobs waking vague echoes among the trees.

"Chic', *Chic'!* you keel, Ah'm know!" she muttered brokenly, and staggered to the bunk, throwing herself on it, her body racked with sadness. A long time she lay there, whispering, moaning to herself, while the hours fled on in silence and cold.

The crunching of snow aroused her. She sat up.

"Lost him, Nanon, at the top of Moose Hill; he got his snowshoes on there before I could reach him!"

She stared at Clyde, her eyes heavy and puffed with tears. He lighted a candle, and looked at her in the yellow flare. "I'm sorry, girl; but I *must* get him; it's my *duty!*" He spoke regretfully.

"You *no* get!" she murmured.

"I *will!*" his voice was strong. "By daylight I'll find his snowshoe trail and follow it, even if it leads me to Eskimo House!" He turned to

close the door—and missed the flash that crossed her face.

"Mabbe," she breathed softly, standing up. "Mabbe, Cly'!"

She gathered chips from the little wood pile by the hearth, and knelt, blowing on the tiny blaze. He watched her graceful figure, as in lithe abandonment it was bent in rounded lines. The fire grew rapidly, showing her features as if they were carved in light brown marble. The shadows danced over her limbs, striking a bold outline of her on the logs behind. Her black eyes were big, reflecting the leaping flames as would tiny mirrors.

"Do you mind if I sleep here, Nanon?"

"Non!" She stirred the fire thoughtfully. "Non; you Poleec', Cly', an' beeg Engleesh homme; you sle'p een cabane, s'posen' you like!"

He sat on the edge of the bunk. "There's many an English woman that wouldn't have the confidence and trust in me that you have!" he whispered.

She heard him, but did not understand.

"You say som'ting?"

"No—nothing, Nanon."

A curious tense look in her eyes, she got some food for him, because the Police can commandeer sustenance and shelter anywhere when on duty.

The meal finished, he signed a slip from his record-book. She tucked it in her shirt.

"Merci."

He lighted his pipe and went to the door. "It'll be daylight in four hours, Nanon. Have you a spare blanket? I'll take a nap by the fire."

The girl tossed him a rabbit-skin covering.

He shoved his pipe in his pocket, took off the wet moccasins, and rolled up in the deliciously warm fur, his arm for a pillow. She blew out the candle, and crept on the bunk, drawing the rough coverings over her.

The fire crackled sharply, myriads of sparks ascending the crooked flue. The embers cast a dull red glow over his figure at rest near the hearth.

No wind, no whisper of breeze disturbed the stillness outside. The gigantic trees loomed tall and graven as images against the dull skies, their branches blurred into a hazy denseness of silent black. The snow-clouds, far up in the

heavens, moved on sluggishly, but the wind that pushed them did not reach the wilderness of the North.

The Constable snored then, his grunts and indrawings of breath sounding sleepily in the stillness of the cabin.

The girl pushed her coverings aside, inch by inch. She got to the floor without a sound, listening to the breathings of the man stretched at her feet. She looked down at him in the dying firelight, a gleam of triumph in her eyes. "You tell too mooch, Cly'! You mooch beeg fool!"

She stole to where an extra pair of her husband's snowshoes hung on a peg; got them down, opened the door with but few light creakings that did not waken the man, and slipped out, closing the aperture with the greatest care. The thonged hoops under her arm, she sped away into the gloom of the forest, vanishing, instantly, in the silent darkness.

Slowly the snow began to fall when she had been gone but a short time, and with it daylight grew apace. Faint, and as a thread of reflection, the pale lights of a gray dawn, tinged with scarlet, appeared through the trees toward the

east, across the Big Barrens. The red of the rising sun, glowing for several moments through the quiet thick veil of snow, was peculiarly angry and foreboding; showing the flakes ruddily for an instant.

Clouds drifted then, and the dreary dullness of day followed.

Clyde stirred, muttered in half-sleep, turned over; remembering his work then, he sprang up. "Nanon!" seeing the light filtering in the forest round the cabin. He looked at the bunk. "Gone for wood!" stretching and yawning.

"D—— it all!" as he pulled on the damp moccasins. "The devil of a job having to travel after that poor trapper again!" He yanked viciously at the thongs. "And all for that dashed Company! It'll be hard on the girl for six months, but"—he sighed, staring at the cold hearthstones—"it's none of my business; I've got to get him, and that's all there is to it!" He laced the thongs, grumbling. "She trusted me!" he murmured, watching the few bits of white snow that dropped from above.

He was hungry.

"Where'd she go?" he asked himself aloud

finally, when an hour passed and no sound of the girl.

The snow had ceased entirely; a vague, desultory wind whined in the tree tops with mournful sound. The loneliness of it all moved him deeply.

"Home," he murmured, "home—and so far, so very far away!" His eyes became moist as he stood in the sullen, chill light. "And *she*—ha!" he laughed harshly, the grim sound ugly under the forest. *"She* in England, and I—where, and what?"

The bitterness of his position sank further than ever before in his mind.

"A policeman whose work is to track, to trail, to hound down wretched beggars, who only ask to be allowed to exist!" A dry sob came from his throat. "A little love from *Her*, just a little confidence—far less than this half-breed showed," he snarled, his anger growing—"far less, and I should have been—— *Rot!"* he said, quietly. "Duty, *duty,* DUTY for me now! *Here's at it!"*

He belted his side arms a hole tighter, picked up his snowshoes by the door, and swung away to the north. He turned when the cabin was

barely visible, among the massive trunks: "Good-by, Nanon; when you get back you will know that I'm after him!" His voice echoed dully. "And sorry to have to do it, because you love him!"

Unerringly he traveled through the dense timberlands, startling foxes and sables from their meanderings in search of food, frightening the ptarmigan that scratched for pine-bark lustily. They broke from his path with trembling wings, and disappeared into a somewhere beyond.

In an hour he reached the little valley at the foot of Moose Hill. "Last night's flurry won't hide his trail much!" he muttered, working his way up the steep side. He stopped when nearly at the top.

Plainly visible through a light cover of white a snowshoe trail crossed his course.

"I thought it was farther on!" He followed it for several yards. "No; this is it! I know Chictou's make of shoe!"

He got out his pipe, lighted it and puffed, resting.

The gray North was still, save for the spasmodic wind. Below him, stretching out in a

vastness of trees, the forest dwindled away to the horizon. The fir under which he stood murmured sibilantly.

"Off again!" He strode on, snowshoes on his feet now, that he might travel the faster. Over hills and through valleys, across frozen streams, and along their snow-crowded banks, in and out of the forest—when it fringed long barrens; across them sometimes, he traveled on, his snowshoes clacking in the silence.

The wind came in his face. "D—— curious the breeze should change so suddenly!" He strode on, tireless, following the trail that grew clearer and clearer. "I've got him!"

After hours of work, and sticking close to the snowshoe marks, he saw the cabin in front of him. "The man's a fool," he whispered, stealing on—"to leave a trail like that—or he must think me one!"

He got to the door noiselessly. "My prisoner, Bènard!" he shouted, revolver in hand.

"Me?" the girl asked, taking off her wet socks, eyes open wide in surprise—"Me?"

He searched the interior rapidly with his eyes—no one there but the woman, and no possible place for a man to hide. He went outside,

studying the scarcely disturbed snow of the little clearing—no moccasin track, no trail of any kind. "And yet his shoes led to the door!"

He went in.

"Where did——" He stopped. The girl was watching him quizzically, a lurking smile round her lips, her black eyes dancing. Slowly suspicion came on him.

"How in the world——" he whispered, looking about. "*Ah!* that's it!"

Chictou's extra pair of snowshoes stood dripping in the darkest corner; *her* heavy, wet stockings were spread on a stool by the fire. Her hair was damp on her forehead, with exertion.

He holstered his weapon slowly, the snap of the hammer, as he half-cocked it, sounding sharply.

Nanon squatted before the blaze, her long, tapering hands spread to the heat. He stood over her, arms folded.

"You got me that time, Nanon!"

There was no anger in his voice, and his eyes were kind. The girl, with a woman's quick instinct, felt the attitude of his mind.

"Ah do eet onlee for sauf Chic'—da's all; you no mooch angry weet Nanon?"

"Not angry, Nanon; I suppose I ought to be, having traveled a good many hard miles on *your* trail!"

The cleverness of her scheme made him laugh, and the sound filled the small spaces pleasantly.

"No, not angry. You saved him this time by the use of your wits, by the hardest kind of work in your body; but I'll get him some day, when *you* are not watching!"

"Eet hav' to be lak' dat! W'en me dere, no catch Chic', Cly'!"

He stared at her moodily then, the fire snapping and glowing, she sitting at his feet, looking up at him. "You love him *very* much, Nanon? He's kind to you? Takes care of you?"

She nodded vehemently. "Me love—si! He good to Nanon—*si!*"

She leaped to her feet, one hand on his arm, face close to his, her hair falling in great luxuriant quantities about her shoulders. In her excitement she spoke in the Ojibway language; now and then he could understand a few words, and from them gathered the girl's fierce devotion for her husband.

"It's all right, Nanon; ——sssh," as tears

came; "it's all right, but I'll have to get him just the same!"

She pushed him away. "You Engleesh," she said, with slow precision, "no know w'at de Canadienne love, she ees! Bah—allez!"

"No!" taking up his snowshoes and mits—"no, we don't, Nanon. Bo' jou', bo' jou'!" He started away to the south.

She watched him out of sight in the forest. "Ah sauf Chic', jus' same!"

II

On a wild, stormy night, Clyde pushed ahead against a driving, biting snow, that stung his face and clogged his way, bound for the Police shanty at Spirit River. The distances were but yards, and each one had to be fought for in the howling fury of the wind. It tugged and lashed at his form, creeping up his sleeves, chilling and strong. He stopped to rest, and turned his back that he might open his eyes fully and breathe more easily.

"This *is* a bad one!" He tried to light his pipe, but the tobacco was damp with the sweat of his body, and would not draw.

He went on slowly, head bent, snowshoes lifting hard. Over Moose Hill and down Long Gulch he traveled. The storm abated; the gusts grew weaker, and the snow ceased of a sudden. Daylight came little by little; with it a breeze—stillness. He swung on fast now, hungry for the food and heat that awaited him beyond. "What——?"

A rounded shape on a little hillside caught his eyes. It was not quite covered with snow, being sheltered by a group of young birches.

"A caribou dead, maybe!" and he kept on, looking at the gray-brown thing as he passed it.

A strange feeling came over him—that he *must* go and see what it was.

He swerved from his course, laboring up the hill, and brushed the snow from the figure.

"It's a woman, by God!" He slipped off his snowshoes, that he might kneel beside her, and turned the body over. "Nanon!"

The girl's heart beat faintly, as with trembling fingers he felt under her shirt. Working desperately now, he chafed her hands, slapping them with all his strength. He breathed his warm breath into her mouth, and lifted the eyelids for signs of returning consciousness. An

hour he toiled, sweat pouring from him. He gathered the hot drops from his face and put them over her heart, on her skin.

"Thank God!" he groaned, as the girl moved, opening her eyes.

"Chic', Chic'," she called faintly. Then, seeing the Constable, she shivered. "He gon' 'way!" her first thought to hide the whereabouts of Bènard from "de Poleec'."

"Are you frozen anywhere, Nanon? *Answer me!*"

She looked at him dazedly. "De feet, mabbe, Ah t'ink!"

He ripped off his capote, put it under her head, gathered wood as fast as he could find it dry enough, and lighted the little heap. When it flamed, he drew off her moccasins and stockings. The small feet were marble white, and hard to his fingers.

"Good God!" he moaned, rubbing them powerfully with snow. As it melted in his hands he gathered more, and rubbed till his arms ached from wrist to shoulder. The sensation roused the girl thoroughly; she lifted her head, watching him at work.

"You Engleesh—good mans!"

"Never mind that, girl; can you feel?" pinching her foot sharply.

She drew it up. "Ai—dat hurt!"

"Ah-h-h! Saved, then!" He pinched the other; she flinched. He rubbed on till he could see the veins purple and swell with the rush of liberated blood. Then he gathered her in his arms and shook her up and down till her cheeks were flushed and her breath came audibly. Exhausted, he laid her on the capote, and wrung her stockings damp-dry.

"What were you doing out here?"

"Ah go see trap fo' Chic'!"

"Where is he?"

"No tell you!" Her eyes glittered. "Ah die een snow bee-for' Ah tell!"

The doggedness of her bravery in her suffering awed Clyde.

"Why doesn't he look after you better than this?—Hell!" he cursed—"to let you tend a line when a storm was coming!"

"Ah los' w'en de win' she come so bad."

"Does he know where you are?"

"Si!" Her head moved up and down.

"Why doesn't he come, then, when you didn't get home last night?"

"Ah don' know!"

Silence between the two, as the shifting breeze whispered about them, fanning the fire by spurts.

"Can you walk, Nanon?" He lifted her to her feet.

"Oh—h—h!" she cried, when her weight came on them. She sagged in his arms. "No can!"

"I'll have to carry you home, then!"

"Non—non!" She fought him.

"Why not?"

She was silent, writhing slightly as the throbs of returning life in her feet tortured her.

Clyde knew why, but he said nothing. He laced on his snowshoes, and picked her up, one arm under her knees and the other under her shoulders, and plodded to the north, her weight dragging his body forward.

"Non! non!" she screamed, struggling and twisting. He held her close, his great strength overcoming her. Her endeavors grew less and less; the heat of his body soothing her mentally and physically.

She slept in his arms.

The miles passed very slowly; his body ached

from her weight, but he pushed on, teeth clenched, legs working automatically.

"Arrêté!"

He swung on his shoes at the voice behind him.

Chictou Bènard, face drawn out of shape with anxiety, came straight to him!

"Nanon, chérie!" he mumbled, kissing the sleeping girl passionately—paying no attention to the Constable. He knelt, and covered the little brown hands with his face, Clyde still holding her.

"Ah'm readee go weet you, Poleec', w'en you say so. Par Dieu, Ah t'ink ma leetle girrl los' an' die, an' follo' de track."

She awoke, hearing the last words.

"Ah be'n dead aussi, only Cly', he come! Ah—ai—!" as she remembered; "go queeck, Chic'—allez!"

The gaunt trapper stood up, huge on his snowshoes.

"Non—Ah *no* go; dat Poleec' homme he sauf yo'r laif! Ah go weet heem, s'posen' he want me."

She trembled in Clyde's arms and sobbed. "Chic', w'at Ah do seex mont' weed'out you?"

She writhed out of the Constable's arms, regardless of the pain in her feet. "Chic'!" kissing him, her arms about his swarthy neck—"Chic', oh—h, Chic'!"

Thus they stood, the three, in the stillness of the forests, the snow as a sharp background against their figures.

Clyde coughed harshly—making up his mind. "You, Bènard, take her home, and don't let her tend a trap line in a storm!"

The girl was the first to realize what he meant. She flung herself at his knees, clutching them.

He lifted her till her face was on a level with his own. "Remember, Nanon, that an Englishman well enough knows *love* when he sees it!"

Her eyes burned into his for an instant. "Ah 'membaire!" she whispered.

"Take her home, Bènard, and keep out of my way—unless you want six months!"

The trapper took off his fur cap. "Le Bon Dieu w'el t'ank you for dees, Poleec', an' Chictou Bènard, he mak' beeg merci!"

The giant figure, before Clyde could resist, kissed his hand. The Constable helped him to get the girl firmly on his back.

"Au r'voir, Chictou!—bo' jou—bo' jou!"

"Bo' jou—bo' jou!" the girl answered, a deep gratitude in her eyes.

Bènard turned. "Ah no forget dees!" he said, and plodded away, the girl clinging to his shoulders.

Clyde saw them out of sight among the sear black trunks of the forest.

"That's *Love!*" he muttered sadly, striking off for home.

Friends

Friends

"HOLLA, Niko!" André La Farge shouted lustily, as his canoe approached the other.

"Eh, la bas, where go?" answered a powerful voice.

The two canoes drifted together and were the only specks that marred the placid surface of Lac du Mirage. The still waters reached away on every side to the distant green shores. Each dawdling cloud was mirrored faithfully and the heat was great. Here and there the swirls of trout broke the flatness and little bubbles floated, round and iridescent.

"Phu-i-i!" Niko Detanges mopped his face with a large red handkerchief that seemed to intensify the temperature of the torpid air.

"Ah go ovaire to de store for buy som'ting for to mak' de trap baim by; where go toi?"

"Tak' de grub to dose mans w'at mak' feesh and la chasse up dere on Portage du Rat." La Farge pointed to several bundles that lay in the bottom of his canoe.

"You got tabac', André? Ah leeve dat leet' piece Ah had at de camp las' night."

"Certainement," the other answered, and pulled out a dirty half plug of black tobacco. He passed it across and watched Detanges idly as he laid his paddle over his knees and filled his pipe.

"Là!" the latter exclaimed, as he lighted the stubby bowl and inhaled great breaths of the harsh smoke. "Ve go togedder leet' taim!"

The two took up their paddles again and the canoes moved forward silently over the calm waters, scarce creating ripples. The sun shone with hot northern summer brilliancy, piercing the green depths with long rayonnings; the air was breathless, humid and still. Ahead the two far-off mountains loomed hazy and indistinct, dark colored at their bases, their peaks gray and overhung with mists.

"Ah goin' be marrié dam' queeck," Detanges announced abruptly. La Farge looked at him and chuckled.

"You be marrié! Dat fine. Who de girrl?"

"Ol' Batiste Victeur, hees girrl."

La Farge started violently; his big hands clutched the paddle till the muscles stood out in

knots on his bare forearms. The gray eyes narrowed and snapped and the square underjaw advanced aggressively.

"Ah—goin'—be—marrié—too!" His voice quivered, and he looked straight ahead.

"By gar, dat magnifique! Ve be marrié, you an' moi, de sam' taim, hein? Vhat fille you got?"

"Ol'—Batiste—Victeur—hees—girrl!" André's tones were of deep emotion barely suppressed. Niko's face contorted into an ugly snarl.

"Bon Dieu, how you tell dat?" he asked through his teeth.

"Ah goin' be marrié to dat girrl," La Farge answered stolidly.

The two let their canoes drift. Then Detanges controlled himself sufficiently to articulate, though his breathing was deep and his nostrils contracted and expanded.

"André, you an' me be'n fren's dis long taim; ve have mak' chasse togedder, ve have sleep togedder, h'eat, drink togedder. Tell to moi v'at you talk dis 'vay h'about?"

"Ah no talk notting onlee dat Ah goin' be marrié to dat ol' Victeur hees girrl," the broad-

shouldered man in the other canoe answered quietly. "She tell to me dat she loove moi an' dat she goin' to marrié moi, das all!"

He looked his friend squarely in the face and met the flashing eyes steadily.

"Ah goin' h'ave dat leet' girrl, André! She tell to me dat she loove Niko de bessis!" Detanges shrugged his massive frame as if his answer left no room for doubt on the other's part.

"An' by diable Ah tell to you dat she no can h'ave us deux! She *mus'* marrié you or me; no can do dat for two; v'at mans have dat girrl?"

The canoes were side by side now, their occupants sitting immovable on the last thwart. A light breeze grew on the lake, fanning its waters into faint undulations that dimpled along noiselessly. The clouds overhead swung on, at first slowly, creating dark shadows that scurried over the surface ghostlike and slow, then vanished into the distance. The canoes turned with the wind that grew.

"Ah no know how feex," Niko whispered.

André thought for an instant.

"Fight?" he inquired, tentatively. The other stared at him.

"Mak' fight wid toi, André?"

La Farge nodded. "Weed knife," he added, solemnly.

"Ah mak' fight den; ve go to de shore an' feenesh dees by dam' queeck!" Detanges decided.

They started for the nearest shore silently. The light draught had grown into a steady breeze; this in turn grew to a strong wind. Long wavelets curled about the men, breaking liquidly into foam. The sun was gone. Dull and dark gray clouds gathered in swiftly moving masses across the heavens, and over in the southwestern horizon huge banks of black thunder heads grouped themselves and advanced deliberately.

When Niko and André grounded their canoes a muffled rumbling sounded. The beach they were on was a small one, fringed by tall pine and hemlock. The underbrush was thick and waved in the wind that now whistled and shrilled through the forest.

"Mak' feex for fight!"

Detanges drew his long knife and tore off his shirt, showing the powerful chest and solid muscled arms. La Farge took off his shirt more slowly, disclosing a gigantic pair of biceps, mus-

cles that stretched the skin over them to the semblance of brown marble. His shoulders were smaller than those of his friend, but they were more wiry and supple. The knife he pulled from its sheath was shorter than that of Detanges, but thicker at the haft and double edged.

"Prêt?" Niko shouted.

"Prêt!" and the two watched each other warily.

"Vait min'te," Detanges said; they faced each other, grave and silent.

"André, Ah no h'ave enemie for toi, but by diable deux ol' fren's no can marrié sam' girrl! You say you goin' h'ave dat fille?" La Farge drew his forehead down till the skin wrinkled like brown leather.

"Certaine, Ah marrié Elsie ef le bon Dieu mak' eet so dat Ah keel you; ef He no vant me for to have dat fille, den you keel me, je suppose," he answered, thickly.

"Bien! tout prêt?" Detanges asked.

"Prêt!" the other answered, and they circled about each other.

The atmosphere was thick and heavy; crashings and rumblings of thunder sounded near by, while jagged tines of lightning ripped and tore

the southern skies. Dark it became, and darker, as the two edged about; then of a sudden they rushed in and grappled fiercely.

"Elsie!" one grunted, trying to wrest his knife hand from the other's grip.

"Elsie!" and the other hung on grimly. They fell, rolling over and over, fighting and dodging each other's thrusts.

The heavens opened, and the rain poured down in sheets and torrents, soaking the two that struggled mutely. The thunder crackled with sharp detonations and rolling vibrations after each flash of lightning had zigzagged its steel-blue way to the earth.

Niko, his body slippery from water and sweat, wrenched his knife arm free.

"Ha, Elsie!" he gasped, and struck downward viciously, but André caught his hand in time, and the sharp steel barely scratched La Farge's side. The two rolled and grunted, each striving to get in the death blow.

The wind shrieked through the underbrush and lifted the wave heads, driving them in damp spray over the beach.

Boom! Boom! Cr-a-a-ack! The thunder peals echoed and re-echoed from the mountains,

that lent themselves as sounding-boards to the violent crashings of the skies.

La Farge held Niko's wrist in a grip of iron, and Detanges had André's knife haft and the hand that held it in a convulsive grasp that could not be shaken off. Thus they lay, glaring at each other, breathing in hoarse gasps, while the rain beat on them and the wind droned through the trees.

Waves broke on the beach near them with cold furlings; then the thunder passed on and faded gradually away to the westward.

André jerked tremendously, but Niko hung on with teeth clenched and fingers set like bands of metal on the other's wrist.

"No good!" he grunted, after more of the silent struggle.

"Ve try som'ting h'else."

La Farge moved his head affirmatively. Each relaxed his hold, and they rose. The storm itself had gone; the rain had ceased, but the wind blew strongly yet, as peeping rays of the afternoon sun broke through the thinning thunder clouds.

The men dressed in silence.

"Eh bien?" André asked.

"Ah goin' marrié dat girrl!" Niko answered.

His friend laughed wildly.

"You no keel me, Ah no keel you; vhat ve do maintenant?"

"Leesten à moi; you know de rapides h'at de Grande Rivière?" Detanges looked keenly at La Farge; the latter nodded.

"Ve go ovaire dere an' run dose rapides; ve mak' de chance for see who go en avant; de man v'at h'alive marrié Elsie. V'at say?"

"Bon," the other answered.

They pushed off their canoes and paddled toward the other shore. The wind died away slowly till the waters were almost as calm as they had been. Above the two the skies were azure blue again, and the sinking sun shot streaks of warm, softened light over everything.

When near the forest line again the mellow roar of quick water came to them softly, and in a short time the current of the lake outlet pushed on their paddles.

"Go 'shore an' mak' see who go en avant."

They shoved the canoes ashore almost at the brink of the white water. Hungry and fierce it looked, rolling and dashing away in great reef breaks and tumbling rock waves. The two stood up and gazed silently at the downward rush.

"Vone mans go troo dere sauf, fif'ten year gon'; dat was d'Indien Ma-na-le-to; he go troo."

"Mabbe ve bot' go sauf; 'ow dat?" Detanges asked from the shore. André swung on his heel in the canoe.

"Ef bot' go sauf, den fighd avec gun at de store."

"Ah'm content," and Niko picked up a bit of dried stick that had a forked end.

"Ef de crook'd end she pointe to d'E'st ou Nord w'en de leet' steeck he fall, you go en avant; of Sout ou Ouest, Ah go."

"Certaine!"

The piece of dead branch whirled rapidly in the air under the impulse of Niko's strong twirl, struck the ground, bounced and fell. The forked end pointed fairly toward the sun that shone hot yellow in the west.

"Eet for me to go," Niko said gently. He emptied his canoe of the rain water, started to push out, thought a moment and came back.

"Aur'voir, André, mon gar, mabbe Ah no see you h'again. Ef Ah'm feenesh la bas," he nodded toward the snarling rapids, "you geef promesse for to come h'aftaire me an' try get troo?"

La Farge drew himself up proudly, and held out his hand.

"Ah geef promesse, Niko, ve ol' fren's, dat a' 'nough; de mans dat laif in half heure have Elsie. Aur'voir, mabbe adieu!"

Detanges rolled up his sleeves, grasped his paddle firmly and shoved out into the whirling current. La Farge stood up on a high rock at the river edge.

"Bonne chance!" he called, as his friend struck the first crests. Niko's canoe bobbed up and down, cleared gulch after gulch of tumbling, white-toothed waters, staggered for a moment, steadied and kept on, then reached the worst of the heavy water. André held his breath and watched.

Niko was standing now and pushed hard on his paddle. Suddenly his canoe swayed, twisted round, fluttered on a sea and overturned in an instant, disappearing like magic from La Farge's straining eyes. Many minutes André watched; nothing was to be seen but the foaming current.

"Bien," he whispered to himself. "Ah geef promesse to Niko dat Ah try. He dead; Ah try jus' sam'!"

He looked all around before he stepped from

the high rock. The sun had gone and the evening skies were tinted purple, yellow and dark blue. To the eastward the evening star twinkled brightly.

"Elsie, Ah loove you; Niko he dead, he loove you aussi; le bon Dieu be goin' say ef Ah marrié you. Niko he no can h'ave you maintenant!"

Before pushing out from the shore André carefully piled the provisions that were in the bottom of his canoe on the bank under a thick spruce, and tied his yellow handkerchief to one of its piney branches.

"Dey see dat an' come look for see v'at ees," he muttered, went to the canoe again, knelt solidly in it, bracing his knees and back.

"Bonne chance à moi!" he shouted loudly, pushing out. He struck the first rapids skillfully, edging his light craft now to the right, then to the left, and dodging the harsh rocks cleverly.

The hardest was still to come, and he knew it. His face was drawn with pain, haggard and gray as he rushed on, nearly helpless, toward the frightful breakers on the steepest pitch of all.

"Elsie!" he screamed as he struck them; then he felt the canoe sag and lurch sickeningly; he

tried frantically to keep control of it, but the paddle was torn from his hands.

"Adieu, Elsie, chérie, Ah loove toi," he mumbled.

Wssht-t-swa-a-sh—br-m-oom—! and it was over.

The thousand stars peeped glittering from the dark vaults and shone on a desolate wild stretch of hurtling waters. Nothing living anywhere; only the silent forest that loomed black and forbidding over the furious, rushing river.

Wilkinson's Chance

Wilkinson's Chance

SHADING his eyes from the blistering glare, holding his horse by the bridle while the sweat rolled in streams, Constable Wilkinson, of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, rested on a little rise of land. Overhead the sun scorched and burned, and across the great prairie distance the shimmering heat waves caused the dreary perspective to roll sluggishly like the sea; brown, gray and green mingling together, chaosing before the man's sun-dulled eyes. No sound disturbed the parched air; no living thing moved, and as he looked about him the only relieving objects were bleached buffalo skulls and bones, reminders of the presence of man in the desolate wilderness.

"God," he muttered, "this is hell!"

He went around and sat down in his horse's shadow, drew out a pipe, lighted it——

"Can't smoke, can't see worth a cent, no water, lost track of the men I'm after, damn 'em, and now—, what's next?" he finished slowly. The horse looked wonderingly at him, then nib-

bled at the stiff, baked grass. Wilkinson's head fell forward in little jerks and he dozed with exhaustion.

Slowly the hours passed on, the man limp on the hot ground, the horse waiting patiently, its bridle over Wilkinson's arm. As the sun neared the musty horizon, red and fiery, life came to the prairie; gophers sat up and their sharp, shrill whistlings pierced the cooling atmosphere.

Suddenly the man stirred, scrambled to his feet and listened eagerly.

"That was a shot, I'm sure!" he whispered, peering through the dusk that now wrapped the prairie in purple and gray lights.

Bang——Bang——Crack!

"I knew it! Down, Andy, down!" He pushed the horse, gently kicking its knees as he did so; obediently it sank and rolled over with a grunt. The Constable dropped beside it, and saw several shapes fleeing toward him; in a moment they were gone.

"Antelope! That's what they were shooting at! Wonder who it is? I'll wait here."

It was dark now, and the prone figures of man and horse were but black splotches in the faint starlight. Then from off to the right came

the sound of voices, faintly at first, then stronger, until words were distinguishable.

"Laramie,—Laramie!"

Wilkinson trembled with eagerness.

"Laramie? My men, after all! Here's luck! Here's fame! I'll make a name for myself yet!" he whispered, exultantly. Carefully he lifted his head, reached over and pressed his fingers strongly in the horse's soft muzzle.

"Quiet, Andy, old nag, quiet!"

"Talk erbout pure, cussed luck," a voice came to him from a little flat below, "missed thet jumpin' deer cleaner 'n a gopher huntin' his hole! Nawthin' t'eat, nawthin' but rotten whisky to drink, and sixty critters to watch!"

"Don't blame me," another voice answered from farther in the darkness; "ye *would* run 'em off!"

"Would run 'em off, ye idjiot? And why shouldn't I? Fifty dollars a head for this lot sure, and a cinch to get 'em!"

"Quit yer kickin', then, an' strike a light whilst I watches these dod-blamed ponies!"

A blaze soon flickered its feeble glow in the valley, and Wilkinson saw the strong features of Slick Ben Laramie, "bad" man, dead shot,

and horse thief. These were the men he had been sent to capture, and whose trail he had lost on the seared and withered prairie.

"Tom!" Laramie called.

"Whut?"

"Where'd that red-coat sojer o' th' Queen go?"

"Way out yander to th' south'ard; last I seen him he was goin' like blazes!"

Laramie laughed. "Neat trick o' mine, doublin' on our tracks, wa'n't it?"

"Yep!"

"Wonder whose arter us this time?" and Slick Ben stared at the little fire that crackled but faintly and from which no smoke came. "Last trip it was Dunn; you mind Dunn, don't you, Tom? An' I 'done' him, right ertween th' eyes! Time afore thet two sojers tickled our trail fer four days; you winged one, you mind? T'other got skeered an' vamoosed!"

Laramie was silent; the world was silent for Wilkinson, save for the stamping of the stolen horses' feet in the gloom beyond, and the working of his heart.

"There's nawthin' 'll run the critters t'night, Tom; come up an' hev a drink."

"Thet hits me, pard!" and in a few moments the Constable saw another man appear in the circle of yellow light; this one was of a wiry build, heavily bearded, and carried a revolver. Wilkinson thought the matter over.

"There's just one chance," he muttered finally, while the two below laughed and talked, "and that is to rush them *now;* I'll have to risk Andy's whinnying." He withdrew his hands from the muzzle; the horse sighed and lay quiet. "Here goes for a name!" Wilkinson drew his service revolver, and crept slowly back for a few feet; then he rose swiftly and ran, bending low, toward the fire. At fifteen yards he stopped.

"Hands up, and quickly!"

The man called Tom had his in the air like a flash, and Laramie was not far behind. The latter looked Wilkinson up and down critically.

"Wall, sojer, ye got th' best of us! Here's my gun." He started to reach down to his holster.

"Another inch and I'll drill you!"

"Alright, sojer, alright; no offense!" Laramie smiled grimly: "You're doin' well fer a youngster!"

"Thanks," the Constable chuckled; "now side by side, you two, backs to the fire." The men did as they were told, and Wilkinson relieved them of two revolvers, two knives and a short, round thong, loaded with lead at one end; all these he placed on the ground at his feet.

"That'll do now, men; sit down," he said, when he had finished the search.

"What's your name, sojer, ef I may presoom to eenquire?" Laramie stretched himself lazily by the feeble blaze.

"Frank Wilkinson."

"B'en long in th' force?" the other horse thief asked, as he seated himself.

"Only two years; came out here to see if I could make a name for myself; never was much good at home."

Laramie chuckled. "You'll do fust rate ef you kep on th' way ye're goin', won't he, Tom?"

"Sure, pard, sure; but say, sojer, honest now: ye got us more by cussed, all-fired good luck 'n by good judgment, now didn't ye?"

"That is true, but my lucky star to-night means a lot to me with the Commissioner. You two have done for some of our boys, besides running off a thundering lot of horses in the last

three years!" Wilkinson's voice rang with a triumphant, sharp, crisp sound, and the faint light sparkled in his brown eyes.

"True fer ye, sojer, true as ye say it; and we'd ha' done fer ye, too, ef we'd 'a' had th' chanst, bet yer life on that!"

"Let that go, Tom; we kinder went off half-cocked, as ye mought say; what I'm eenterested in, is why this young feller should come out o' a civilized, God-fearin' country to this blasted, alkali wilderness, an', on top o' that, go to sojerin' at seventy-five cents a day." Slick Ben lifted himself on his elbow as he continued, "Whut d'ye say, sojer, ef we swap yarns erbout our lives? We can't leave here till ye gets yer hoss in the mornin', and as ye got ter set up an' watch us, curse me ef I don't stay awake with ye, purvided ye tell th' story o' yer life; how erbout it?"

"Mine isn't worth listening to." Wilkinson stopped a moment, and his eyes became set in a thoughtful, remembering stare. "But," he hurried on, "I'll tell it so that I can hear yours; only remember that anything you say will be used against you."

"Don't let thet worry you, sojer; I ain't

agoin' ter eencriminate myself, you bet! Wall, here goes!"

Laramie tore up some grasses, gathered a few twigs that were near him, and, as the flames danced into the cool darkness, Wilkinson wondered at the clean-cut features, the high, square forehead, the strong mouth and firm chin of this noted "bad man." "They said he was good-looking; he is, too," he muttered to himself. Meanwhile Laramie sat lost in a reverie; he started suddenly, then, looking keenly at Wilkinson, he began, and the Constable listened in astonishment, for the voice he heard was quiet, modulated, that of an educated man.

"I was born in New England, my friend, thirty-two years ago. My mother died when I was a little lad, and my father didn't much care what became of me, at least I presume this to be the case, for I never saw him after I was five years old, though I heard of him indirectly. Somehow or another, I grew until I was old enough to go to school. My father paid my expenses and gave me a good allowance, beyond that, nothing. I went to school, and then formed the ambition to go to Harvard College——"

"But——" Wilkinson began.

"Please let me finish," Laramie said quietly. "Having this object in mind, I worked hard at my books, and, my allowance still keeping up to the standard, at seventeen I entered Harvard. My sophomore year I fell in love with the dearest woman, to me, in the whole of this bitter, hard world, and in my junior year, or rather at the beginning of it, we were married. Then, without a word of warning, the allowance ceased absolutely; no word of explanation, nothing. The firm through which the money had been paid refused all information, and there I was, penniless. My money had been ample to support two quietly, and I felt sure that I could obtain work that I should be fitted for after I graduated; that was why I married when I did. Bess, that is my wife's name, had a little of her own, and we decided to come west; we went down into Texas, to a place called—the name is immaterial, however—and I obtained employment in a milling concern. Things went on pretty well for a time, then came the deluge. The foreman hit me one day with a block of wood; I hit back, and he came at me with a knife; I picked up a wrench, and let him have it, killing him on the spot. I fled the country, a

posse after me, and since then—— You know the rest."

The silence was absolute when Laramie finished. His partner, Tom, sat moodily in his place, twisting and twirling grass roots between his fingers. Now and then one of the ponies snorted or stamped; otherwise everything was still.

"Where is your wife now?" Wilkinson asked slowly.

Tom jerked his head up. "Don't be more 'n a fool than ye hev be'n, Ben! We're took; don't give th' gal away!"

"Aw, th' sojer ain't lookin' fer her; he wouldn't find her ef he was!" The voice had all its original harshness; and the steel-blue eyes were fathomless and cold again.

"Come on, sojer, tell yer leetle story," Tom sneered viciously.

"It's short, and goes somewhat like this," Wilkinson began. "I, too, was born in New England." He watched for a gleam of recognition to cross the other's face, but the features were stony hard and set, and he continued, "I had every advantage, and—threw them all away. Now I'm out here trying to do *some-*

thing that's decent. My mother is the only one in the world that has a single ray of hope left for me; after all, one's mother's hope and confidence are the last to go. I promised her I would go straight and come back with something to my credit; that's all there is to my life."

"Ever been in the jug?" Laramie asked shortly.

The Constable hesitated an instant.

"I kin see ye hev," the other said. "Whut fur?"

"That doesn't matter, does it?"

"Naw, I don't suppose it do. Wall, she's a-comin' daylight." Laramie stood up slowly.

Faint and far over the eastern horizon shivering, timid veils of light were creeping up the heavens. Pale-blue at first, then as they grew stronger changing to green and yellow. Little by little the prairie distances took shape, until the rolling hills and hollows loomed everywhere. Once more the gophers whistled, and the coyotes became silent; here and there appeared their vague brown-gray shapes as they scuttled over the rises of the land.

"Go ahead of me, men, over that flat there, till I find my horse." Wilkinson took all the

cartridges from the prisoners' guns, then throwing his rifle across his arm, he walked after the two. Some distance away they found the horse, which was quietly grazing on such bits of grass as had not been entirely blasted by the sun. The Constable mounted, and, with the two still in front of him, went back to the herd of stolen ponies.

"There's nothing to eat, men, so we might as well start!" Slowly the ponies began to move; then they trotted along. "Sorry, men, but I'll have to put these on you."

Laramie drew back. Instantly Wilkinson covered him with the rifle. "Better come quietly, Laramie; you've got to come anyway!"

They looked at each other, then the horse thief held out his wrist. A rattle, clink, snap, and the prisoners were handcuffed to each other.

"You can ride if you can keep your horses near enough together."

Tom looked up gratefully. "T'anks, sojer; she's a-goin' ter be a scorcher to-day, no mistake."

The sun, in fierce, red glory, was just coming

over the sky-line, and its hot rays burned even at this early hour of the morning.

Suddenly, as they moved onward, Wilkinson saw Laramie looking sharply across the prairie, and heard him mutter to his companion. He himself searched the bare wastes and saw a moving speck approaching rapidly.

"Rescue," he whispered; then, "Halt! Dismount! Lie down!"

Laramie and Tom lay flat, while Wilkinson sat his horse, watching. Nearer and nearer came the speck; at last he could distinguish a horse and rider, traveling very fast. The rider saw him then, and swerved in his direction.

"By God, it's a woman!" unconsciously he spoke aloud.

"Woman? Woman?" and Slick Ben leaped to his feet, dragging his companion with him. "It's Bess, Tom, sure as fate!"

"Stand where you are, men, or I shoot!" The Constable cocked his rifle. The woman was very near now; still nearer; the pounding of her pony's feet was plainly discernible in the morning stillness. It lurched up the slope, staggered, groaned, and rolled over, dead; the woman slid to her knees, utterly exhausted.

"Charlie, Charlie!" she gasped.

"Steady, Bess, steady," Laramie answered, stiffening and straining at the handcuff; "what is it, the boy?"

"Yes, yes, yes—dying, ca—calling for you; you said you would be back last night; I waited and waited, and then couldn't stand his calling for you any longer, so I started out to find you if I could. I have tra—traveled nearly all night; the brave little horse did his best."

She looked up and saw Wilkinson's red coat.

"Cha—Ben, oh, Ben, it's too late, then?" Her face went white, and she sank slowly, her eyes fixed on the Constable in a strange, wild stare.

Laramie looked over his shoulder. "Can I—can I talk to my wife?" he asked huskily. Wilkinson nodded.

Tenderly, as well as he could with one hand, Tom helping, Laramie lifted the girl, for she was hardly more than that, and leaned her body against his.

"Yes, I'm afraid it's too late this time, Bess, too late." His strong body shook, but no tears showed in the steel-blue eyes. "What happened?"

Shudderingly the words came in answer.

"He was playing cowboy yesterday, and he fell among the horses; one of the stallions kicked and bit him. Oh, Charlie, it's awful! he's dying, calling, calling for you; I can hear him now!" The girl got to her feet. "I always said it would come to this; the horses have taken everything I have in the world, my boy, and because of them the police have taken you!" The tears came then, in gasping, choking torrents to her eyes, and the four stood thus, while the broiling, blistering heat grew and grew.

Laramie, his voice trembling, his eyes on the Constable, said, "Wilkinson, will you take my word, that I will deliver myself to the Regina barracks within thirty hours, and let me go to my boy for the last time?"

The girl caught her breath. As if by magic, there passed before Wilkinson's memory eyes a sweet old figure; he saw it at a window, and the face was wet with tears. He dismounted, fumbling at his chain.

"Go! I'll take your word! Remember what it means to me!" and he unlocked the handcuff.

Before he could move, the girl had kissed his hand.

"God bless you, Policeman; Charlie will be on time; ride, ride, Charlie, *you* may not be too late; I'll walk back. *Go! Go!*" she screamed.

Wilkinson's face worked and quivered, he swallowed hard.

"Take my horse, girl, quick! Tell him to bring it back when he comes," he shouted hoarsely after her as she sped away.

They were gone, lost in the seared, brown lands.

The Constable turned and saw Tom watching him. He tried to smile, but somehow the smile wouldn't come; then the other held out his hand.

"I'm nothin' but a horse thief an', an' wuss, but I've seed all kinds o' men, an', sojer, I jest wants fer ter say this, thet ye'r the whitest God ever made, an' ef ye'd take my hand, I'll never go crooked again."

They shook hands silently, and as silently started on their way, Wilkinson riding Tom's horse. All that day, through the glowing heat waves, their eyes reeling and aching, their brains numbed in their skulls, the two plodded slowly on. When night, with its short hours of life-saving coolness, came again, they stopped.

"No need o' hitchin' me t'night, sojer; I'd cut

me right fist off fer ye." Wilkinson said nothing, and the two lay down hungry, side by side. At daylight they went on, and when the sun was straight over them in all its fury they reached the Mounted Police Barracks at Regina. Wilkinson turned the horses over to the officer of the day, then saw his prisoner registered, measured, weighed and safely locked up in the guardhouse. Weak from his long trip and lack of food, he reported to the Adjutant, who commands the Barracks and who looks after all routine.

"Well?" Adjutant MacAlbee asked, seeing the dusty, sun-stained figure before him at attention.

"Found Laramie and a man called Tom with the stolen horses, sir; came on them near Watson's Creek. Captured them, and the horses, sir, full count." There he stopped.

"Where are they?" curt and sharp came the question.

"Horses delivered to officer of the day, the man called Tom delivered to the guard."

"Well? And the other? Come, man, speak up!"

"I let him go, sir."

"What?"—the Adjutant leaped from his chair—"you WHAT?"

"Let him go, sir."

MacAlbee stared in furious astonishment.

"And, if I may ask, since when has a Constable had the power of permitting prisoners to go free? Answer me that, sir!"

"May I tell the circumstances, sir?"

"Yes, yes, go on! I suppose the truth is that the other got away from you; of course it's the man we have wanted for four years, and you were told so, but that doesn't make the slightest difference; oh, dear, no, not the slightest!"

The Adjutant gradually worked himself into a frightful rage, and paced wildly up and down his office while Wilkinson repeated what had happened. When he had finished, MacAlbee stopped in front of him.

"And you expect *me* to believe this damned rot?"

Then swinging on his heel, he pressed a button; an orderly came.

"Send the officer of the day here at once!"

The latter appeared in a few moments and saluted.

"You will take Constable Wilkinson to the

guard-house, and see that he is in close confinement! For this, my fine fellow, you will get six months in the guard-house and dismissed from the force! Take him away!"

Wilkinson moved after the officer of the day as in a terrible dream. As he went out of the Adjutant's office he looked up at the clock.

"It's half an hour past his time, and this is the end of everything for me!" And again that tear-stained, dear old face flitted before his eyes.

Mutely following, he was crossing the Barracks square to the guard-house, and was almost there when a tumult arose in the far corner of the yard; he looked back and saw two horses galloping wildly across the lawns. On one of them huddled a human form, the other was riderless, its bridle fastened to the man's waist. Wilkinson turned, and, heedless of the officer's shouts, ran back. Laramie, for it was he, rolled off into the Constable's arms, and he saw blood streaming from his open shirt collar, and sluggishly dripping from his back. The wounded man looked at him through half-open and dulling eyes.

"I—I—I got there on—on—on time," he

whispered; then, gathering himself, went on, "had a br—ush with Pol—ic—e from Woods Mo—u—n—ta—in, they—tr—ied to—to get me, but I was afr—aïd that you—would be court-mart—l—d, so—so I ca—me as soon as I could." The head fell back; a slight tremor ran through the muscles, and Laramie was dead. From behind the crowd of men that had gathered came a choking, rasping voice.

"Let me see my old pard, just once!" The crowd parted, and Tom came through. He knelt beside the stiffening form, and a deep silence was on everything. The evening skies shed a soft glow, and, strangely enough, through a rift in the clouds came the last ray of the setting sun; and it shone for an instant on the dead man's face, then it was gone. Tom knelt silent, his shoulders heaving and falling. Finally he stood up.

"Good-by, old pard."

Wilkinson, just as the guards were about to take their prisoner away again, grasped him by the arm—

"The girl, the girl," he whispered; "where is she, and who was he?"

The other looked at him an instant.

"Sorry, sojer, but I swore I'd never tell, an' I won't!" and he walked away, his leg irons clanking softly.

"It is finished!" Wilkinson whispered, and brushed off the tears that would come.

The Current of Fear

The Current of Fear

"WHO says the dogs in this blamed country is savage?" Black Dan waited, glowering drunkenly, revolver in hand, at the crowd in the bar.

"Who says it?" he roared again, cursing. "Yur a passel o' cowards; yu dassent shout!"

One man's hand reached toward his hip. A spit of flame from Black Dan's weapon, and a lifeless thing twitched on the floor. The Indians stared, expressionless; then Tim Samson, with a sweeping throw, hurled his whisky in Black Dan's face. The crowd were on him as he staggered and got his gun.

The huge man stood up slowly, his face twisted into a frightful snarl. "That's whut yu call a fair show, is't? Yur wuss cowards than I thunk, damn yu!"

"He's drunk, boys, and Jake did try fer to draw on him, so that's fair 'nuff; but, by God, we won't stand fer no cheap skate from Simpson

a-comin' up hyar and callin' us cowards, whut?" English Jack sprang on a chair as he spoke.

"No!" the crowd thundered.

"Well, then, let's make the skunk take my team—they're the wust I knows of hyar-a-bouts, bein' part wolf ev'ry one of 'em—and drive to Skagway!"

Black Dan's eye glittered. "Yu dassent! I'll take yur dogs clear to Yukon an' back!"

"Yu take that bunch to Skagway, an' yu kin have 'em; if yu don't get 'em there we'll fix yu next trip!" Whispers passed round. "What's Jack up to?" "Ought to ride the cuss!" "He knows his biz."

"Neow yur talkin', Jack." Dan's face lightened. "I'll——"

"Hol' on, hol' on, I ain't done yit! We'll give yu some grub, a pair o' snowshoes, but no knife nor gun."

Black Dan hesitated, the crowd jeered.

"Who's a coward now, yu big bully! Yu kin drop a man, I'll admit, when his weepon's in his holster, but yur a-scared to take eight dogs to Skagway!" English Jack snapped his long fingers in derision.

"I'll go," the big man said, sullenly, "s'posin'

Hell freezes over; gimme a drop o' whisky ter take erlong?"

"Shall we, boys?"

"Sure, an' a good drop; he'll need it with yur team," and the men roared with laughter; why, Black Dan did not understand. So it was arranged.

"They'll tear him ter bits ef he falls down," Long Anderson whispered to Jack.

"Sssh! Thet's whut I'm countin' on," the other answered; "we cyant shoot him in 'cause Jake reached fer his gun, but by the etarnel, this 'll fix him good. I'm a-goin' ter foller him, so's not ter lose my team; they'll have a good feed fer onct!" English Jack chuckled. "Lend me yur outfit, Andy?"

"Cert! Jiminy blazes, but yu've got a imagination!" Dirty Dick, the bartender, furnished the whisky; he shook his head solemnly as he did so, but it was no affair of his. The gang tramped out to see Black Dan start.

The afternoon was cold, freezing with bitter sting, and the wind yowled mournfully across the wild country. The skies were low and drear, the clouds moving with imperceptible slide. To the right, mountains loomed gray-

dark and hazy, reaching beyond the foot-hills in vanishing heights. The lonely wind came in nasty gusts, whirling the snow in biting masses. In the stables, dogs howled sadly; one yelping, the others taking up the weird cadence. English Jack brought out his team; eight ugly brutes with drooling mouths and wolf-like coats. They snapped and bit at him as he curled the long whip about their heads.

"Get in there, Swift!" The leader showed his teeth and took his place before the team. Jack slung the last straps over them; then fastened the light sledge. The food, a small blanket and the whisky were all tied down.

"Now then, Dan, come on ef yur not afeard!" All this time the man had been watching, liquor courage in his heart; he grabbed the whip, "Psh—sht marse!" and away.

The crowd gazed after him, out of sight on the plains, going like mad.

"He'll get there, Jack, by God, he will!"

"Don't yu fuss yurself 'bout it; he'll git skeared purty soon, and then——" They all went back to the bar.

English Jack took a drink. "I'll start in an hour or so, catch him 'bout on Crooked Plains."

"Them fools," Black Dan muttered as the dogs coursed on, "a-thinkin' I cyant run this hyar team ter Skagway! I'll git my crowd thar, come back, wait fer night, an' wipe out the whul' shebang!" He sat comfortably on the sledge, its whirring sound lulling him almost to sleep. Then the snow began to fall as he climbed into the uplands. Straight and damp the flakes came, clinging to his face, coating his clothes with prismatic myriads. The north wind blew mercilessly, and the dogs whined as they sped on. Deeper and deeper the layers of white became, until the team could pull no more, even though the man lashed them hard, bringing away bits of fur at every stroke.

"Marse, damn yu, marse, go on!" The softness reached the bottom of the sledge, impeded its way heavily, and the eight stopped, gasping in loud pantings, audible above the weird whistlings of the storm.

Black Dan got off the sledge and put on the snowshoes; tied a bit of rope to the runners. "Ah-hai marse!" The brutes struggled on.

"I'll show them cusses back thar," he swore. On and on till the snow was more firm on the hills. The whisky began to lose its effect, and

he remembered all that he had ever heard of "wolf" teams. Strangely a fear grew within him; like a stream that swept him along, powerless, and he watched the dogs furtively.

No sign yet. They plodded ahead sullenly, heads low, tongues streaming. He pulled out the flask and took a drink. "That's better," he whispered, as the hot liquid ran down his throat. "Hai-a marse!" The animals pulled away sluggishly. Thicker and thicker came the snow, deadening the click of his snowshoes as he strode, clogging his way. He took another drink soon, and the way seemed easy, the world a glorious thing, success within his grasp. "I'll bust that crowd!" he muttered.

Drink after drink, hour after hour was passed, till the bottle was empty. "Hell!" He threw it away. The whip thong was red with blood from the vicious blows. All night he kept on, the alcohol stirring his blood, urging his mind to false action, forcing his muscles to work. Daylight found him over the hills, heading for the Crooked Plains and keeping his course fairly well for Skagway; the dogs bleeding at every step, snarling at every curl of the whip, snapping at each other in their distress. Little by little

the fumes wore away, and the hints, whisperings, of the savagery of the "wolf" teams came to him stronger than before.

"They're a-lookin' at me now," he said uneasily, as Swift, the shaggy leader, turned his dripping jaws toward him from time to time. Still the team kept on obediently, and the snow softness grew into a crust as he came down toward Taku River. He tried to sit on the sledge, but his weight was just enough to force the runners through, and the dogs would stop, eyeing him. He had to walk. The whisky was past stimulation; he felt no hunger, the team did; their pulls became weaker and weaker, then they stopped again.

"They're a-watchin' me!" he grumbled, and tried to beat them into movement. No use. 'At each whine of the lash and snap of its tip they huddled closer together and growled. As it was hopeless to attempt more, Black Dan got some food and squatted on the snow. Swift came forward with a sneaking step, eyes aflame. "God!" the man screamed, leaping to his feet; he lashed the brute; it retreated, mane stiff, fangs showing. He had to eat standing, the dogs watching him the while with starving eyes; then

he tossed them the remains, and they fought for it, tangling the harness. When Black Dan was ready he tried to undo the mess; Swift foamed and crouched when he approached.

"Damn yu, I ain't afeard!" But there was a quiver in the tones. By dint of kicks and beatings he got the harness straight. He slipped as he started.

"No fallin' down!" The whispered words of a friendly Indian, as he left the night before, forced themselves on him, grew in his ears till the very wind seemed to shriek them. Was it his fancy, or did the dogs keep their eyes on him continually? Did they wait for him to fall?

"I ain't a-goin' ter fall," he shouted in answer to his thoughts, and lashed away.

Then the sun burst forth, dazzling his eyes with its violent glare. Spots of blue appeared between the rifts in the snow clouds and the wind came less harshly.

"My God, fer some whisky!" Dan whimpered as he felt the current of fear sweeping, sweeping him on, his body and mind too tired to resist. Again he attempted to sit down; Swift turned each time; the seven others waited, watching. The man now was the one to strug-

gle, and the fight was hard against nature, against the fear that was slowly maddening him.

"I killed Jake, mu fust mu'der!" he whispered again and again; the dogs swung their heads, studying him, almost as though they were wondering how much longer he would last, so it seemed to Dan.

"No fallin' down!" The words seared his mind, crazed him by their suggestion. Hour after hour he stuck to it, picking each step with assiduous care. The face of the man he had killed, with the shadow of agony on it, stood before him often and frightened him still more.

"No fallin' down!" Yet he began to slip and totter on his snowshoes. "Curse the luck," he mumbled; "cyant I stand up? Ha!" He almost fell. The dogs saw and turned. "Marse!" as he recovered himself; the whip sang again and again in the bitter air.

"I'll show yu!" Then he swore till his voice was gone. His powerlessness struck him like a blow. The team seemed to realize, and hesitated in their traces. Often now he slipped, caught the toes of the shoes and stumbled badly. The harder he tried the worse he became. Night grew slowly, darkening the distances, hiding

the long plains in misty gloom. Tears in his eyes, the man crawled along, the dogs barely moving. "That's it," as he fell on one knee. "No, by Heaven, not yet!" as he picked himself up. Swift saw, but kept on when the thong cut a bit of fur from him. At last Black Dan knew that he could do no more. One final attempt to lie down, but the team crowded as close as they dared, snarling. He went on a few paces. "The whip, my whip!" he groaned. In his fear he had lost it, and dared not turn his back to the dogs. Overhead the cold-glittering stars of a mid-winter night shone strangely far away, twinkling with eerie effect. The aurora glowed in the eastern heavens, bulging with clouds of nebulous light. The wind had gone; everything was silent save for the panting of the dogs and the liquid lap-lap of their tongues. The man's knees refused to carry his huge bulk.

"No fallin' down!" He saw the words in letters of fire, and understood their full meaning as the brutes sat about him, waiting—waiting.

"If I fall, they'll tear me ter bits," he whispered aloud; then, "Sha'n't do it, s'help me!"

Wearily, slowly, he undid the knots in the rope that fastened the blanket to the sledge;

wrangled off the harness, lifted the long thing, and by dint of many poundings drove it into the snow, not very far, because he was weak, but far enough for his purpose. The dogs edged closer in a half circle; he kicked at them. With his back to the support, he managed to lash himself securely, so that when he relaxed the upright sledge held him.

"Thar, yu cowards, ye dassent touch me! I'll rest awhile, and git ye inter Skagway yit!"

Then all was still. The night became freezing cold at the approach of dawn. A drowsiness came over Dan. "This is great!" he stuttered, feeling himself warm and comfortable. His head sank on his chest and he was quiet, the team still waiting.

They did not know.

One of Three

One of Three

"BON!" Guillaume Bouchard shouted, crashing his heavy fist on the board counter. "Napoleon no de grreates' man en de worrl'! Dat feller ees Laurier, by Gar, Laurier!" Moutin, the storekeeper, leaned forward, his little black eyes sparkling with enjoyment of the argument. The store was close and hot, and the air thick with the reek and fumes of many pipes. Here were gathered all the gossips and wise men of the tiny Quebec village, according to time-worn custom, and the debate to-night was an especially good one. Old Père Donvalle nodded slowly, then in the silence after Guillaume's assertion he took the clay pipe from his mouth, stroked his long, gray beard premeditatively and spoke:

"*Bon,* Guillaume, mon garçon, eef you t'ink no man so beeg en le monde as Laurier, vat you goin' say ven Ah say dat Laurier no so grand as le Jesu Christ? Hein?"

Murmurs from the group showed that this

indeed was a hard proposition, and they all waited gravely for Bouchard's answer. The low-hanging lamp shed but weak rays of yellow light that scarce reached the walls, and only vaguely illumined the neat rows of frying pans and kettles that were strung in precise lines from the smoke-darkened roof beams. The clusters of rubber boots and shoepacks seemed blacker than ever, and bunches of brooms dangled forlornly at all angles. Guillaume, a huge lumberman of magnificent physique, viciously gnawed a chew of tobacco from his plug, and stared fixedly at the open door of the big round stove, whence came comfortable beams of heat.

Moutin touched Bouchard playfully on the ear: "You an' Josèphe an' Raphael, you got all arrange 'bout Lucille, hein?"

"Par Dieu, non," Josèphe Bouchard laughed from across the store, "broddaire Guillaume ees slow lak de molass'; run up de hill when she's col'!"

"Oui, so slow lak de moose go 'long een de deep snow!" and Raphael St. George chuckled.

Guillaume's strong, heavy face wrinkled with amusement. "You attends, you fellers; to-night Ah goin' starrt een hour for Camp Seex, be back

to-mor' après-midi, den we mak' see 'bout dees affaire; dat agréable?"

"Le Camp Seex? Why for?" Moutin asked.

"De Boss, he say for me breeng hup de telegramme w'en she comme, an' maudit, she ees arrive jus' taim suppaire, damn!"

" 'Ow you goin', by de Run Roun' or by de longue traverse?"

"Ah t'ink Ah go longue traverse; de snow she no so bad for de dog dat way." As he spoke, Guillaume went to the door and opened it. It was a glorious mid-winter night. At his feet the ice-bound river twined its frozen shape past the village out to the open country, where its contour melted into the white that covered everything, and was lost. The glittering stars sent steel-like shafts of light to the earth, while the setting moon dispersed the fading shadows and glistened on the chimney pots of the compact little mass of houses. Here and there shone twinkling lamps that seemed to warm Guillaume, notwithstanding the bitter sting of freezing in the air; as he watched, a figure came running up the hill on which the store was built; it reached him.

"Eh, you grand bêbé," a cheery voice laughed

from under a heavy shawl, "no tak' all de door." The figure brushed by him into the house. He followed it.

"Bien, Lucille, you no go bed 'tall?" Moutin asked, as he deftly unwound the cloth from the girl's head and throat.

"Bien sure, Grandpère, onlee Grandmamman she want for de l'huile a leetle, so den Ah come," and she glanced roguishly at the three, Guillaume, Josèphe and Raphael, that crowded about her as close as they could.

"Petite coquette!" Moutin chortled, rubbing his thin, worn old hands gleefully the while; "ef you know dat dese t'ree garçons here, Ah goin' mak' de bet you no come for de l'huile!"

"You say too much dose t'ings, Grandpère," but Lucille's big brown eyes danced with mischief, and she tossed her head merrily.

"Why toi no come to-day cut de wood for me?" She took hold of Josèphe's coat. "Lazee, hein? Bah, mauvais garçon!"

"No lazee 'tall, Lucille; onlee Guillaume an' Josèphe an' moi, we mak' arrange for no go cut wood, no do notting teel you say w'at mans we t'ree you goin' marrier, voilà!"

"C'est vrai?"

"Si, dat trrue!" the other two answered together.

Most of the group that had been in the store had gone home; those that remained, however, smothered their chucklings to listen.

The girl looked at the three big men in pretty defiance.

"You t'ink you all somt'ing magnifique for to mak' sooch talk to moi! Bon, Ah goin' see w'at you do! Ça for you!" and she snapped her fingers in derision.

"Par Dieu," growled Raphael, good-naturedly, making a grab for her. She was too quick, picking up the oil can, her shawl, and darting out of the door, apparently all in one motion.

The three stared at one another.

"Sapristi! you, Guillaume, by Gar, you was de wan w'at say for do dees way weet la petite! Sacrée, eet no goin' worrk!"

"Nev' min', garçons, ev't'ing be fus'-class by'm-by."

Moutin climbed slowly on the sugar barrel to put out the lamp as he spoke.

"Bon soi', bon soi', Moutin," and the three departed, leaving him to lock up with the pon-

derous key that scraped and squeaked shrilly in its lock.

"Be back to-mor' certain?"

"Bien sure," Guillaume answered, as he turned in at the little gate in the picket fence that surrounded his tiny home. "Au revoir."

"Au revoir, Guillaume." The other two passed on, the sound of their voices sinking gradually away down the silent road.

Guillaume pushed his door open and walked in. A warm little blaze flickered and fluttered on the stone hearth, its light showing up the colored prints and old-fashioned pictures on the low walls. In the center was a large one of Laurier.

"Guille, c'est toi?" came a strange, thin voice from behind a partition.

"Oui, Mamman, Ah goin' Camp Seex jus' queeck."

"Eet ver' col', hein, Guille?"

"No so bad lak' las' night, Mamman."

"You comme back to-mor', je suppose!"

"Oui, Mamman, bon soi', chérie."

"Bon soi', mon fils!"

Guillaume went to his corner of the sleeping attic, found his heavy mitts and stockings, his

coarse woolen muffler, and his sheepskin-lined capote; then he went softly down again. From a cupboard he got some meat and bread and stuffed it in his great pockets.

"By Gar, eet plenty col'!" he whispered to himself as he closed the door tightly behind him. The dogs in the warm, thatched stable whimpered and whined as he came among them.

"Nannette, Mouton, Pierrot, Vitesse," he whistled softly. Like gray shadows the four rustled from their hay beds and scampered out. Quickly he harnessed them to the light sledge and sat himself comfortably on it.

"Marche!" and away they went; out of the yard gate, flying down the silvery road and from that into the somberness of the mute forest. On and on, now across openings between the trees where the snow shone cold and brilliant, now through tall, majestically silent groves of heavy Norway pine, then down to and along the frozen river where the night light was perfect. Foxes scuttled away before this thing that moved so fast and so quietly, and once as the whee-ing sledge passed under a gigantic fir, an owl, startled from its watching, gave a muffled Hoo!

and sailed over his head to the darker shades of the forest on the other bank.

Traveling rapidly, the swift motion created a drowsiness; try as he would his eyelids would droop, and in this semi-conscious state he imagined that he was talking to Lucille.

"You no marrie me?" he muttered thickly, then a pause.

"Ah loove you so mooch, petite, mak' nice home, ev't'ing for you." Another pause. "Ah know Josèphe he loove you, an' Raphael aussi, but moi, ha! Ah loove you lak' Laurier he loove le Canadaw!" A long silence this time, then, "Fair play for t'ree? Bon, Ah'm satisfy, but w'en you goin' décider?" A short hesitation and he hurried on, his words clear and strong. "You say you goin' marrier de man dat have bessis' courage?" In an instant he spoke again. "Ah oon'stan', petite, Ah goin' try!"

Just then the sledge struck a branch that had been frozen; it lurched, rose on one runner, then settled back with a crash. This thoroughly wakened Bouchard, and he began to whistle jauntily. As the stars dimmed one by one and the air became sharper and more biting, he guided the dogs off the river on to a wood road.

Along this they dashed, cleverly avoiding the deep ruts made by the log sledges from day to day as they transported monster loads from the cuttings to the river landings.

When the chill grays and blues of a winter dawn lightened the eastern horizon, Guillaume reached Camp Six. The men were just getting up, and the smoke from the cook fires rose straight into the air.

The foreman ran out.

"Holy tickets, I'm glad ye've come!"

"W'at's mattaire?" Bouchard asked, as he stood up slowly, stiff from the long ride.

"Mike Lawson damn near cut his leg off yesterday; he's purty near dead now, but if any one can save him you can, by taking him as quick as God 'll let you with your dogs; the horses couldn't get down to the village now!"

Guillaume stood still for a moment; then, the facts having thoroughly soaked into his mind, "Bon," he said; "Ah tak' heem, but dogs mus' have for eat!"

"Sure, man, sure; hurry up, by jiminy, hurry up!"

Bouchard got some food for the four that stood panting from their fast pace, and while

they ate he swallowed a steaming-hot pan of tea and gulped down a handful of bread and pork.

"Readee!" he shouted. Five men carefully brought the unfortunate Lawson to the sledge. The man was as weak as a child, and suffering great pain. His left leg was swathed in strips of cloth, blankets, anything that they could find in camp to stop the bleeding, but the red flow had soaked through, and it turned black in the freezing air.

"Easy, boys, easy!" Lawson whispered as they laid him on a pile of bagging which Guillaume had fastened to the sledge.

"Thanks, boys, you've been mighty good to me," the poor fellow called weakly as Bouchard seated himself on the little space he had left at the rear of the sledge for the purpose.

"That's O.K., Mike; good luck to ye, son!" the whole crew shouted as they sped off.

The dogs did their best, Guillaume urging them on from time to time, but what with the heavy load and the run they had just finished, the pace was not as fast as before. The sun was up now, but its rays could barely be felt; pale and sickly it looked, peering out now and then from the heavy, soggy masses of snow clouds.

They came to the river again; the speed increased here.

"'Ow, was dat you cut——"

Cra-a-ack! Sw-a-a-assssh! The ice, thin here over swift water, had let them through, dogs, sledge and all!

Guillaume grabbed the wounded man by his capote collar; they both went under for an instant, but luckily when the ice broke it did so over a large circumference, so that when Bouchard came to the surface, pulling Lawson after him, they had not been swept under the ice beyond by the current.

"Oh, Dieu, oh, Dieu!" Guillaume shouted this again and again in his excitement and fear for Lawson. The latter had lost consciousness. By dint of crushing the weak edges of the hole with his free arm, Guillaume reached strong ice and struggled out, dragging the other. He stared at the senseless man.

"Oh, bon Dieu an' Laurier, w'at do, w'at do?"

He felt the man's pulse; it was fairly strong. Ice was forming on both of them; indeed, when Guillaume moved, even now, his clothes crackled.

"Eet two mile a half f'om here; Ah goin' carry heem, par Dieu!"

No sooner had he decided what to do than he did it.

He got Lawson on his own powerful back, with the cut leg stuck forward through the crook of his arm, and he started.

The violent exertion soon warmed him through, but the other's clothes froze fast to Guillaume's. He hurried frantically on, the dogs, their harness dragging, following behind. In less than an hour he saw the village in the white distance and renewed his efforts. Père Donvalle saw him coming, and men came out to help. Josèphe and Raphael were the first to reach him.

"Dat too damn bad!" Josèphe said as Guillaume, breathless, gasped out the story.

"Tak' heem queeck to le Docteur, queeck you can!" he begged, as the other two relieved him of his heavy load. They staggered off, Guillaume coming more slowly.

As he drew nearer his eyes sought Lucille's home; he looked, but somehow he could not find it in its accustomed place. He rubbed his face and searched again; then he saw a few charred

He hurried frantically on

embers, that was all. A pang of agony went through his every fiber.

"Lucille, Lucille!" he cried aloud and ran on.

With tears in his eyes he came to the house, and was dully looking at the remains when an adored voice called him.

"Guillaume, grand bêbé!" He looked up at the heavens first, and then saw Lucille coming from a neighbor's home.

"Dieu and Laurier, merci!"

"You' Mamman an' Grandmamman an' Adolphe?" He scarcely dared listen to her answer.

"All sauf by Raphael an' Josèphe; dey have du grand courage!"

His heart sank within him at her words, and he suddenly realized that he was terribly cold; he turned away sadly, when she spoke again.

"Toi aussi, you have du grand courage!" He came back swiftly, his arms half outstretched, then he remembered the arrangement; no, he could not in honor take advantage of Josèphe and Raphael's absence to glorify himself.

"W'en you are dress an' warrm an' have eat, comme to de store; Ah have som'ting for to say." Lucille disappeared in the house.

With a feeling of an impending great event Guillaume changed his clothes, had a drink of "w'isky blanc," a bite to eat, then he rushed out, having scarcely told his mother anything, though she clamored for information.

To his astonishment the store was crowded when he got there; every one in the village was on hand, all in their best clothes. He did not understand.

"Aha, Guillaume, w'at Ah tell to you?" Old Moutin grinned. "Lucille she goin' mak' choose maintenant!"

The faces, the kettles, the boots, everything danced for a moment before Guillaume's eyes, but he gathered himself.

Josèphe and Raphael came then and the three stood silently together.

A happy laugh, a little song, and Lucille appeared; the three drew long breaths.

"Dat Lawson, 'ow ees he?" she asked of Josèphe. The latter coughed, stuttered and looked at Raphael, who nodded solemnly.

"De Docteur say he goin' get well, but dat eef Guillaume had no breeng heem so fas', den —la mort!"

The crowd sighed in admiration.

"Merci, my broddaire an' my frien'!" Bouchard stammered.

"No merci necessaire; dees ees fair play een honeur!" Raphael answered, and the three drew themselves up proudly.

The girl looked at each. "Pleas' go dere," she said, pointing to an open space by the counter. Then she was silent. Men and women stood on cracker boxes, bags of flour, anything that would lift them up, for was this not the engagement of their favorite to one of three men that worshiped her, and for each of whom she had a warm corner in her heart?

"My frien's, Ah goin' marrie dees man!" She ran lightly across and threw her arms about one of the three. The group laughed and shouted, cheering and crying out good fortune and happiness. Then they all departed silently, leaving the girl and her choice, while the snowflakes drifted slowly to earth and the church bell tolled the vesper hour.

A Day's Work in the Mounted Police

A Day's Work in the Mounted Police

"ANY complaints?"

One of the mounted policemen slid wearily from his saddle as he spoke.

A November sky spread the cold yellow hues of a stormy sunset over the endless prairies, and a chill, strong wind mourned its desolate way through the horses' tails, whistling around the corners of the squatter's shed with a doleful whine that rose and fell monotonously.

A woman had come to the low door in answer to their halloo and the two men looked at her disconsolately. She rubbed her work-worn hands together nervously.

"No ther hain't, leastways"—she hesitated and looked keenly past the horses, seeking to pierce the winter's gloom that lay heavy over the bare landscape—"leastways, none that I can tell on," she continued, with a catch in her voice. "Jim ain't ter hum; ye'd best stay th' night; it's

er goin' ter snow, I guess, by th' feelin'. Yer kin stable yer critters down in th' shed an' welcome."

"I reckon we'd better, Fred; it's a long thirty mile to old Ned Blake's, and *I* think snow's a-comin', too."

The other nodded and, still mounted, walked his horse toward the shed. The first speaker followed, leading his animal. The long, rickety building was down in a little roll of the prairie, and as the two approached it a forlorn old hen cackled harshly, and a pig, disturbed by the sound of the horses' feet, grunted and rustled in the straw.

"Who's the old gal, Bert?" Fred asked, as he undid his girths, the horse playfully nibbling his shoulder.

"Sho, forgot ye warn't over this route yet; she's widder Gleeson; a feller called Jim Stephens lives yere; kinder helps round the farm, y' know!" and they both chuckled.

Bert Saunders was an old member of the N. W. M. P.* The years had grown on his broad back in the service, and, as he said, "I hain't no good for nawthin' else."

* Northwest Mounted Police.

With gray hair and deep-set eyes that were hardly to be seen behind fierce, bushy eyebrows, Saunders showed that if age brings experience, he must have his full share of it. The other was a young man; tall, well built, a good horseman, with a "good eye," but old Saunders would quietly suggest that "he was a leetle too quick."

"Th' widder seems to hev sum'n on her mind," Bert remarked, as they went back to the house, "but 'tain't nawthin' excitin', I'll bet; mabbe she's lost a calf, or mabbe ol' Jim got some whisky som'ere."

"Set ye down, boys, set right down near, till I gets ye some vittles." The old woman hurried about, pottering among the kitchen implements, or rather makeshifts for them, and rattling vigorously in a huge tin box that served as tea-bag, salt-cellar, meat holder and bread basket.

"Queer old place," Fred muttered, looking about as they stood by the fire.

"Yes," Saunders answered, in a whisper, "an' ther used to be some queer doin's too, when she"—he jerked his thumb toward the kitchen —"was a young 'oman."

The inside of the main room was dark and

dingy with age and dirt. A huge four-poster bed stood in one corner, the blankets on it rolled up in a tangled heap, and the shabby, ragged pillows had evidently been used as footstools. Old cowhide boots stuck out from beneath the bed, and overalls with a strange assortment of clothes dangled ungracefully from pegs all about. The candles spluttered and flickered, giving out but faint, weak rays of light that scarce illumined the long, narrow room.

"Thar, ye kin eat!" Widow Gleeson drew up the dangerously tottering stools, and seated herself on the edge of the bed while the two men began their supper. For some minutes nothing was to be heard but the metallic clinking of the tinware, and the gurgling sips Saunders took of the hot tea.

"I'm damn glad we're in here, instead of fightin' our way to Blake's; listen to that——" Fred said then.

"Gosh, yes!"

The threatened snow had come outside, brought by a gale of wind. The particles were hard frozen and battered viciously in their million numbers against the walls, while the wind screamed fitfully. When supper was over the

men got out their pipes and smoked by the crackling fire, whose flames shot up the flue in straight, roaring lines, drawn by the fierce draught.

"No complaints, d'ye say, Widder?" Bert asked slowly, rubbing the tobacco fine between his palms. She fidgeted nervously, then hesitated again, seemingly listening for something.

"Nawthin' that I can tell on, but Jim, he hain't been good ter me lately; hit me with th' axe handle two weeks 'go, an' cussed som'n orful becos I didn't have no whisky; ye boys know thet since ye've be'n so sharp a-watchin' them fellers 'cross the line it's purty hard ter get whisky, ain't it, now?" she finished, appealingly.

"Yes, Widder, we're lookin' arter 'em purty close now, sure," and Saunders laughed; "it's tol'ably hard ter run th' liquor over inter Canady now! Wall, what about Jim? What's he done?" The chance question told, and the old woman was startled.

"How d'ye know?" she whispered.

"Don't, but I'm guessin'."

"Now, boys, I don't know nawthin', but since I comed back from Uncle Jack's—I went over thar when Jim got c'ntanker'us, ye know—I seed som'n funny 'bout h'ar; look ahere!"

She reached down and pulled out one of the cowhide boots. Saunders examined the rough, worn leather carefully; then he gave a short, sharp whistle. Any one that knew Bert's ways would have realized that something was wrong, and Fred did know the old fellow well, having made many a ride and route with him; therefore he leaned forward eagerly.

Saunders turned the boot over and over.

"How long's Jim had these yer boots?"

"They hain't hisn!" the woman answered quickly.

"Oh, ho! so they hain't Jim's? Did ye ever see 'em afore?"

"Um—mm," and a strong negative shake of her head.

"Looks like blood, don't it, Bert?"

"Looks like blood an' *es* blood."

Saunders put the boot down. "We'll look round a mite, Widder."

With stolid eyes the woman watched them searching here and there, peering into dark corners, shaking old baggings while the dust rose in clouds.

"Here's something!" Fred called, and held up a red-stained block of wood that he had

found under the mess of plow chains and old metal.

The older man examined it as carefully as he had the boot, and again whistled sharply to himself; the block he put by the boot.

"Look furder, Fred." They hunted and prodded in silence, then Saunders turned on his heel.

"Looky here, Widder, what you got 'gin Jim?"

The old woman seemed to shrivel and her eyes grew large and black.

"Nawthin', 'cept he's cross an' I'm sick o' him," she answered shortly.

"H'm," and they searched again.

"When did Jim go 'way?"

"Three days ago, jus' afore the last snow."

"Where'd he go?"

"Dunno; said as he was goin' ter Rickson's, but he allus wuz a liar."

"H'm, Rickson's; that's eighty mile by the trail," Saunders said more to himself than for the benefit of the others.

"How'd he go—ride?"

"Yep, took th' horse, an' I kin stay here an' starve, or walk out, I s'pose!"

They found nothing more, though the search had been long and thorough.

"What do you think about it, Bert?"

"I hain't thought 'nuff yet; let ye know in th' mornin'; better turn in now!"

He pulled off the long service boots and stretched his feet gratefully to the fire. The old woman watched them awhile longer, then took a candle and crawled slowly up the shaky ladder that led to the small attic over one end of the long room.

"You boys kin hev the bed," she called down.

Saunders looked at the mess of clothes. "I guess not for mine, Fred; I'll roll up in the blankets right here."

"The same for me!" Fred got their blankets from their saddle rolls they had brought in, and unfolded them on the rough floor. They took off their coats, and these, with the long fur capotes, made excellent pillows.

When the candles were out, and the tiny glows at the ends of the wicks had vanished, the interior was dark save for the ember glow, and silent save for the storm sounds outside.

Gust on gust the fierce breaths shook the old timbers till they creaked, drone on drone came

from the flue, and the bitter cold air found its way through the cracks in the floor, biting the men's faces as they lay rolled in the warm, blue wool blankets.

Just then the door blew inward, burst by a gust more powerful than the others.

"Damn, damn!" Fred grumbled, as he got up slowly to close it. He looked out first. It was a wild winter's night on the prairie. In the faint snow sheen the short distances were hazy and vague, laden with hurtling masses of white. Overhead the sky was dark, but the heavy cloud banks were black, and their dim shapes could faintly be seen tearing in great rent and split masses across the heavens. Fred shivered as he pushed the boards into the aperture and fastened it with a bar of wood.

"The horses 'll catch it t'night," he muttered as he curled up again. It seemed to him that he was hardly asleep when something moving caught his attention. He lay quiet, listening intently, trying to locate the sound. From his position he could just see the foot of the attic ladder, as it was between him and the window; then a black something came between him and the faint white reflection. It moved aside.

"Th' old woman! What's she want?" he whispered, his lips scarcely moving. The dull scrape of a sulphur match came to him softly in answer, and he shut his eyes to slits. The blue flame spluttered into life, then came the yellow shine, and he saw the widow carefully light a candle stub under cover of her hands. Its light came redly through the flesh of the fingers.

She looked a long time at the sleeping men, and the policeman felt his eyes twitch and jerk with the strain. Then she turned her back and moved noiselessly to the far end of the building. She stopped there, looking back, and Fred started at the ugly expression on her face. She shook her gnarled fist at the two, then leaned over and began pulling and tugging at some of the floor boards. Now wide awake and alert, Fred sat up carefully under cover of the blanket and watched. At last she got one of the boards well up and drew a long something from the bosom of her tattered dress. The policeman looked hard, but could only see that it seemed black, and a piece of cloth.

As slowly the woman dropped the thing in the hole, lowered the board, quietly replaced the things that had been on it and turned to

come back. Quick as he was she saw Fred drop.

Instantly the candle went out and everything was quiet save for the weird sounds of the wind.

He felt for his revolver, and was about to call Saunders, when the bar at the door was violently pushed aside, the door itself flew open, and he caught a fleeting glimpse of a muffled figure sneaking out.

"Halt there!" he shouted, but the wind forced the sound of his voice into his throat.

"W's matter?" Saunders asked, sleepily.

"Wake up, man, quick! Something's wrong!"

As though to the bugle call the other was out of the blankets and on his feet, revolver in hand. The two stood still for an instant in the darkness, the snow piling coldly on the floor.

"The old woman's skedaddled," he called then, and hurried over to the corner where he had seen her mysterious actions.

In his haste he broke match after match trying to get a light.

"Take it easy, boy, take it easy!" Saunders followed him over.

"What's all this anyhow? What ye doin'?"

as Fred hauled at the boards, tossing everything right and left. He got them up and the light showed a dark, long hole dug in the earth. He leaned over, lowering the candle.

"Holy tickets, Bert, look at that!"

The other craned his neck. "He hain't be'n dead more'n two days neither!" he said slowly; "she's done it, an' tried fer ter set us on this same pore feller, so's we'd go ter Rickson's termorrer an' give her a chanst to git out. The ol' varmint didn't expec' us till next week. I tol' ye we were early on this route. Well, come on an' find her; she ain't far t'night; hidin' in th' barn, mos' likely. Hell of a job to take her ter th' post, now, ain't it?" So, talking quietly, with the coolness of long years at this sort of work, Saunders calmly pulled on his boots, while the younger man chafed at the delay.

"Look out she don't shoot ye, Fred; may hev her gun," he advised, as the two, with lowered heads, went out into the fury of the night.

They reached the shed; the thatch door was wide open.

"She's in there all right." Saunders stood at the entrance. "Come out, ye —— —— ——, we've got ye, —— ye!"

No answer.

Slowly Bert's anger grew, and he swore at the black interior.

His voice echoed each time very faintly in the straw-smelling place.

"Le's go in an' haul her out—come on!"

They went, and Fred struck a light.

"The horses!" he gasped. Saunders turned; the horses were gone.

"Out wi' ye quick, 'less ye want ter walk! Strike fer Blake's; she won't go agin' this wind for Rickson's, an' I don't believe she can manage them horses, not both on 'em, anyhow!"

They floundered on to the trail, discernible only under the snow by its flatness, and hurried along it as fast as they could. The snow hindered them more and more, piling against their legs and creeping up under their trousers, where it clung freezingly.

"There's one of 'em!" Saunders shrieked, as a black object came in sight just off the track. They came up to it; one of the horses, and cleverly hobbled! The poor brute stood there helpless, its mane and tail heavily laden with ice particles, the nostrils' edges solid and eyes tight

frozen. When the hobble was cut it moved stiffly.

Saunders started to mount. "Get out o' that," and Fred shoved him aside; "I'll go! Ye ain't fit to go on such a night as this; ye'r a better man fer it, but I'm younger, and you'll freeze 'thout yer fur; go back and wait. I'll find her if she's between here and Blake's!" and he rode off, hearing Saunders' curses but for an instant. The latter turned against the flying snow sheets.

"He's a good un, jus' same," he muttered. "Gosh, it's damn cold! I believe I must be gettin' old after all." He went back to the house and built up the dead fire.

Meanwhile Fred struggled on. Little by little the horse recovered its strength and moved faster, but the cold began to tell on the man's body, damp from the exertion of the run he had had. He got the horse into a gallop and swung his arms viciously.

"That's better," he whispered, as the flying scud showed brighter in the east. He kept on steadily and daylight grew; the snow drifted worse and worse. The little horse labored badly, sank into a trot, and from that to a walk, hanging its head and licking the snow.

"I'll shoot!" he yelled

Then far ahead the policeman saw a speck, and urged the horse to a trot again.

"That's her," he said aloud, in a few moments.

The distance between them lessened. There, astride of the other stolen mount, was the old woman, her head and body wrapped in an Indian rabbit-skin blanket; the horse was walking steadily along, she huddled in the saddle. She heard nothing because of the noises of the wind till Fred reached her side.

"Halt!"

She stuck her face out, saw him, and, before the man could move, grabbed her bridle, jerked the horse off the trail and galloped across the snow plains.

He drew his revolver.

"I'll shoot!" he yelled, but he might as well have thought it for all she heard.

"By God, I will shoot!" he swore, and took aim. "Great tickets, can't I catch her? I *will!*" and away he went, firing twice in the air to try to intimidate the fleeing figure, but without success. His horse stumbled, gathered itself and stumbled again, and he saw that she would get away from him.

"I'll have to shoot the horse. Poor old Bill; but I'll have that woman, so help me!"

He drew up, took aim and fired.

"Too low!" as a spit of snow rose behind the other horse.

Bang!

"Too far to the left!"

Bang!

"Got him!" as the brute staggered to and fro.

He moved on slowly and came up to the fugitive.

The ugly face peered at him through the blankets.

"I've got you now; get off that horse!"

She did not move; he dismounted, grabbed the blankets and yanked her off.

Another shot and the wounded beast was dead. He patted the lifeless head as it lay on the snow.

"Poor old Bill—good horse!" he said, huskily; "you died for the service." He turned savagely.

"Now you walk, d'ye hear? Walk!" He waited. No move from the shape on the crust.

"I'll kill yer if you don't get up!"

"Ye dassent," she snarled then, speaking for

the first time. He coaxed, threatened, promised —all to no end.

Then he picked her up, slung her over his saddle, fastened her there, stripped the dead horse of its saddle and bridle and fastened them on his own.

"I'll have to walk; the hoss can't carry both," and so they started, he leading, bridle rein over his arm.

The exercise warmed him, as he was chilled through and through and his ears were frozen. He rubbed snow on them as he went on. They proceeded thus for some time.

"Funny I don't hit that trail!" He led the way to a snow rise. As far as he could see in the now full gray light were moving clouds of snow; no flat anywhere, nothing but hills or hollows that appeared and vanished between the squalls.

"Here, you!" He shook the mass in the saddle roughly. "Where are we?"

"S'pose I'm goin' ter tell?" the cracked voice answered fiercely.

"But we'll die out here—I'm lost!"

"S'pose I care? They'll kill me at the Post fer killin' Jim—what's th' dif'rence?"

"You admit murdering Jim?" he shouted.

She nodded, as he could tell by the shaking of the blankets.

"Here's a fine outfit," he said to himself. "A clear, good case; maybe stripes if I land her at the Post, and certain death if I don't find the way!"

He thought hard and an idea came.

He put the bridle rein over the horse's head again, patted it, and stroked its ice-hung muzzle. Then he stood aside, and struck its back sharply with his hand.

The horse threw up its nose, hesitated, then swerved sharp to the right and started to trot. Fred ran behind, holding it lightly by the tail. On the animal went, its ears pricked forward, life in its movements where it had been sluggard and slow. Sometimes walking, then trotting again, but always moving decisively, the horse kept on.

The man was tired and the snow chafed his ankles and legs badly. His body was warm, but his hands, feet and face pained severely. They came up over a rise, and the long-familiar house stood just beyond.

"Thank God!" he muttered incoherently, and

kissed the poor frozen muzzle again and again. The animal seemed to understand and tried to nip his hand.

Saunders was waiting.

"Ye got her?" was the first question.

"Sure!"

"Where's my Bill?"

When Fred told the story the old sergeant's face quivered hard, but, "A good horse was Bill, an' many miles I've done wi' him!" was all he said.

He helped to undo the lashings, and the blanketed figure dropped into his arms.

"Here, none o' that—stand up!" He let go and it fell inert.

"Froze a mite, I guess."

Saunders pulled aside the blankets. The face he saw leered up at him white and lifeless, the eyes open and dull set. With a curse he drew the blankets back. A short knife was driven in over the heart, and the old, worn hand was still fast to the handle.

"D'ye know this?" he asked.

"God! no," Fred answered. "I saw nothing, 'cept when the horse started out right the blankets moved a trifle."

"That's it, then; she knowed th' way, an' when she seed you was a-comin' right she did this job; wouldn't that beat all? Wall," he continued, with a sigh, "it's all in the day's work!"

Jean Baptiste's Christmas Present

Jean Baptiste's Christmas Present

SMOKE curled lazily from the top of the birch-bark tepee and drifted away until it was lost among the dark pines. The morning air was biting cold and the crust on the snow crackled sharply as two puppies rolled and snapped at each other on it. Then one obtained a firm hold of his comrade's ear; the result was a long screech from the persecuted one. The blanket over the tepee entrance was pushed aside and Jean Baptiste stepped out.

"Ah, you leet' diables, alway mak' nois'! Marche-on, allez!" Baptiste looked up at the heavens; they were threatening and dull; great brows of cloud writhed and twisted along, though there was no wind in the forest. Then his eyes swept the long white horizon that showed here and there through the trees.

"Mor' snow, by dam'!" he muttered as he gathered up some wood at his feet. "Marie, mak' déjeuner queeck; Ah mus' go see de trap befor' de storm he come!"

"B'en oui," a woman's voice answered from inside the wigwam.

Baptiste threw the wood past the blanket door, and proceeded to feed his six dogs with pemmican. They fought at once over the food.

"An' you, Rico, you gourmand, alway steal somet'ing f'om oddaire. By gar, Ah geef you keeck!"

Jean landed a rapid thrust with his toe, and the shaggy brute drew away growling.

Then silently the white flakes eddied down; in groups and one by one they gathered on the bark of the little home, clustered on the far-reaching branches of the firs and hemlocks, and filtered slowly through the pine needles.

"*Wee-se-ne!* [Breakfast!]"

Baptiste brushed the snow from his arms and shoulders, stamped his moccasins free of it, and went in.

A small fire burned hotly in the center; a girl sat beside it, gently shaking a frying-pan; a pannikin of tea, some pieces of bread and meat, and a bit of salt pork formed the breakfast fare. Jean spoke seldom during the meal, and Marie had curled herself up again in the rabbit-skin blankets.

"B'en adieu, chérie; Ah be back een two day a half eff no too beeg storm."

He bent over the delicate brown face and kissed it.

"Certainement be back, Jean?" the girl asked with a little catch in her voice.

"Certainement." And Baptiste picked up his snowshoes, an axe, and a blanket in which Marie had put provisions; then he laughed softly.

"W'en you expec'——"

"Non, Jean; no say dat," she answered shyly.

He went back and sat down beside her.

"Tell to moi, your Jean, chérie, so dat Ah be sure know, hein?"

She hid her face in his skin capote.

"Ah be ici sans doute." He laughed gayly. "Au revoir, bo' jou', bo' jou', petite!"

"Bo' jou', bo' jou'," she answered steadily, though her big brown eyes were troubled and moist. He was gone.

No sound save a faint whisper of the forest caused by the wind that was coming slowly. Then the two puppies, lonely now that the dogs were away, nosed their way past the blanket and stretched themselves by the dying fire. Marie lay there, thinking, wondering, sometimes sleep-

ing, while the storm grew outside till the forest creaked and shook and its branches waved wildly to and fro. Suddenly a powerful blast brushed the blanket at the entrance aside, and whirled in, carrying myriads of snow particles, and waving the rabbit furs over the girl in turbulent ridges. She sat up, wakened by the cold, clammy bits on her face.

"Bon Dieu, vat tempête!" she whispered, and stood up. Her figure was not as lithe and slim as it had been some months before, and she seemed weak. Before fastening the blanket again, she looked out. Everywhere the snow, tossed and tumbled by the wind, drove in white sheets across the tiny clearing; she could hear the angry roaring of the pines and distinguish the whistling of the firs and the fierce droning of the hemlocks as gust after gust swept madly through them.

"Misère, misère!" she murmured, and built up the fire. The puppies whined at being disturbed and crept close to her. The girl then boiled some tea and ate a little food,—but very little,—and lay down again in the furs. Slowly the hours dragged by, but the storm yowled on with unabated force; gradually the gray light

that came through the fire-hole in the tepee-top faded. From time to time Marie threw wood on the fire. Then it was dark. No light in the wigwam but that of the bright-red embers that cast their shadows on the circular bark wall; their glow was vague and mysterious because the gale sounds overcame the faint cracklings, and the fire-eyes shone ruddy and noiseless. A tin kettle in the corner diffused a green-white reflection on one spot, and the girl watched it unconsciously.

Suddenly the puppies jumped up and barked —not really barked, but did their best in short yelps and diminutive howls. Marie was wide awake instantly and listened. No unusual sound could she hear, but the dogs scratched and dug valiantly at the blanket she had securely fastened. The girl moved to rise, when a heavy body fell against the entrance and rolled almost to her feet, tearing the door with it. Marie leaped to her feet and stared, frightened at first. The body lay there motionless.

"Vone mans, b'en vrai!" she whispered, holding the rabbit-skins about her. She went over softly and listened; no sound came from the blurred heap beside the embers. Then she

leaned over and pulled from the man's face the blanket in which he was entangled.

"Bon Dieu!" she screamed, and looked again.

The face she saw was of snowy whiteness, except for a small round hole just under the black, dank hair, from which a red stream trickled heavily. The eyes were closed and the mouth was drawn out of shape with pain. To see better, she hurriedly threw nearly all the stock of wood Baptiste had left for her on the fire, and furiously blew at the embers till a strong blaze cast a lurid yellow glare in the interior. She bent down and listened at the man's chest, then started up in alarm.

"Jésu Christ! he alive an' Ah have notting for do for heem," she cried. The silence after her words was greater than ever. The wind had decreased and now sobbed fitfully; between the gusts the stillness was absolute.

Then from afar in the white distance came the long, mournful howl of a wolf. The sound startled her, and her senses were at once alert; she chafed the man's hands and face with snow, listening now and again at his heart. Little by little its beats grew stronger and more regular;

at last his eyes opened and roved blankly over the little interior.

"*Ni-be, nibe!* . [Water!]" he whispered.

Marie poured a thin stream between his parched lips.

"*Miguetch!* [Thanks!]" But in the big, wandering eyes there was a look of terror, the fear of a hunted animal.

The girl questioned him softly in the Ojibway language, but he did not understand; then she tried French, but without success; in despair, she lapsed into the broken English frequently used by the Indians in conversing with men of different tribes whose language they do not know.

"Who you?"

"Gwinguish," he muttered feebly. "Cree f'om Longue Lac. Hodsonbaie mans send police aftaire *win* [me] for why Ah have no skins for paie de debt." Here he coughed, and the exertion started again the red flow from the tiny round hole under his hair. With deft fingers the girl wound her handkerchief about the wound and pressed it down firmly with her long, thin hands. The flow ceased.

"Las' night," the weak voice began again, "de police mak' shootin' at win. I fallin' down

een de snow and mak' hide een bush; dey go pas' win, an' Ah comme creep, creep, t'rough de fores' teel Ah fin' dees place. Baim-by de police fin' de track my snowshoe an' comme dees place, an'——" The Indian's voice trailed off in a groan, and he rolled over, unconscious.

"Bon Dieu!" Marie whispered to herself. "Bon Dieu! pauvre diable! Ef Jean vas onlee here! Maintenant—vat Ah do?" She went to the entrance and listened; the storm had gone and the forest loomed massive and black against the dim, cold light of the snow underneath and beyond. No sound—not a whisper—disturbed the throbbing stillness. Uneven and jagged, the tops of the firs and hemlocks pointed straight upward to the heavens, where the northern lights fluttered and streamed in long pennants of drifting, shifting vividness.

"De tempête gone! Jean no back two day! Vat Ah do?" She spoke aloud in her distress. "Ah no can go fin' heem; am no strong 'nough. An' ef de police—Dieu!" She almost screamed then, as through the forest she heard the clinking of bits and the muffled plod, plod of horses' feet in the heavy snow. Instantly she leaped back into the wigwam, her weakness and her ex-

pected child forgotten, and in her terror she shook the wounded Indian roughly.

"Ah—ah—ah!" he groaned, and opened his eyes.

"De police dey come!" she hissed. The words seared his mind and forced his brain to action; he tried to stagger up, but fell helpless.

"Be quiet—say notting!" she hissed again, covered his face with her rabbit blankets, rolled him by main force into a corner, his back to the fire, and leaped again to the entrance.

"Hillo! Hillo! Bo' jou'!"

The mounted police—six of them—had reached the little clearing and stopped, seeing the tepee.

"Bo' jou', bo' jou'!" she answered steadily, though her heart-beats suffocated her. "What ees?"

"We air looking for a damned scamp named Gwinguish; fired at him yesterday, saw blood on the snow, and lost him when this rotten storm came up. Haven't seen him, have you?"

The girl clutched at her throat, as though to force her voice to steady speech.

"Non," she answered; "no see 't all."

"Curse the luck!" The man slid from his

saddle as he spoke. "Chasing about this God-forsaken country, and then to miss our man! We——"

"Whose wigwam 's this?" one of the police asked in Ojibway.

"Jean Baptiste," Marie answered bravely.

"Free trapper?"

"*Ai-hai* [Yes]."

"We'll stop here and feed the horses, Ah-teg," the first man ordered; and the six tethered their horses to trees and drew the dark-blue blankets carefully over them.

"Got fire?" he asked, and the girl nodded.

The police stalked into the tepee, their spurs tinkling in the silence.

Marie shivered, and entered after them.

"Who's that?" the leader asked quickly as the fire blazed up, pointing to the figure under the rabbit-skins.

"Baptiste." Her voice quivered, then was steady again. "He hurt hees foot yes'day."

"Too bad."

Soon the rattling of tea-pannikins filled the tepee, while the police joked and laughed, sometimes cursing their luck and the weather, and wondering if they could still catch Gwinguish.

"He's making for Wabinoosh, sure."

"I don't think so; more likely to try for Fort Hope, and hide among the Indians there."

"Say,"—the one who spoke Ojibway stood up, tall and swarthy in the yellow light,—"Ah goin' tak' look round."

"Go ahead, Michele; go ahead, and welcome." The sergeant chuckled as the man went out. "Always looking for things he can't find; but, by ——! he's a good trailer, boys! If it hadn't been for that cursed snowstorm, he'd have found our man sure enough."

Marie said nothing, but her heart was full of fear, because she knew that but little snow had fallen since Gwinguish had come, and that Michele was one of the best trackers in the whole mounted police force. She reasoned that the Indian would in all probability find the wavering, wandering tracks made that night, and she shuddered at the result, because a short shrift is given thieves of the Hudson Bay Company, and she was friendly to the poor devil who sought to evade the company's crushing maw, because her husband was a free trader and trapper.

As the police ate and drank, the fear at her heart became unbearable. Strangely weak and

dizzy she felt; nevertheless she stood up, and with wavering steps sought the cold air outside. Daylight was just coming over the eastern horizon. Leaning against the bark walls, she caught her breath quickly at seeing the tracker, Michele, hunting here and there like a hound, his dark figure dimly discernible in the faint light. As she stood there, a hand was laid on her shoulder, its fingers gripping her flesh.

"Jean," she sobbed, as the gaunt face peered into hers, "Gwinguish, honted, shot by police, een dere. Ah tell dat heem you. Pauvre diable, sauf heem for me!" And she fainted.

Jean Baptiste carefully laid Marie on the snow. "Chérie!" he muttered; "alway do somet'ing good! Ah sauf Gwinguish." He straightened up and listened.

Within the tepee the policemen laughed and chatted; without all was stillness, and his trained ears caught the light scrunch, scrunch of the tracker's feet as the latter sought here and there.

Baptiste stiffened on his snowshoes.

"By gar, dose confoun' police! Ah goin' fool dem!"

He moved noiselessly to the tepee entrance, his snowshoes clicking but very softly. Then

dashing the blanket aside—"You all too beeg dam' fool for to catch moi!" he called loudly, and darted away among the gray and black trunks.

"The devil!" The sergeant jumped to his feet. "Gwinguish, by all that's holy!" He sprang to the entrance. "Michele! Blast you, you red devil, you're not worth your salt! Here's our man just here." The six tumbled helter-skelter into the clearing, rushed to their horses, rolled the blankets in a heap on the saddle-bows, and galloped away in the gloom.

Baptiste, the storm having covered his track, had decided to return to his camp for two reasons: the expectation of a "papoose" and the fact that fur was not plenty at the time of a heavy fall of snow.

When he approached his tepee he had heard the voices of the mounted police, and, free trapper though he was, had thought it best not to approach too openly. He left his dogs and sledge in the timber, crept carefully, met Marie, heard her warning and appeal, and was first with the task, a difficult one enough, of leading the police a vain chase.

The bushes had scarce closed behind his figure

when they parted again as Michele slunk rapidly after the flying figure.

"Allez!" The team leaped to their work. Jean was a light man, and the sledge whirred fast over the snow.

"Matche—Manito!" Michele cursed as he floundered after; then, raising his head, he whooped, "Ho-e-e-e-a!"

Far off to the right the police answered, and he waited for them. Gray, pink, purple, the night clouds drifted away, hued by the coming sun, whose rays pierced the somberness of the forest and tinged the snow-laden branches white, gold, and silver.

Nearer and nearer the horses' feet sounded; then:

"Damnation! Michele, where in thunder 'd he go?"

"Dees way," and he pointed out the sledge trail.

"After him—after him, men!" And away they went, the horses lurching heavily, the men growling and swearing.

Back at the tepee, Marie opened her eyes and struggled to her feet. Everything was silent; the sun, two hours up, gilded the horizon in a

dazzling glare. "Jean, Jean," she murmured vaguely, then she remembered. Her weak footsteps roused the figure in the blankets in the tepee, and Gwinguish sat up.

"Who you?" he began, blankly staring before him.

With feverish haste the girl knelt at his side.

"Jean, he follow' by police. Dey t'ink heem you; Ah say so! You go 'way queeck!"

"Ai-hai," he moaned, and tried to stand up. A lurch, a stagger, and he fell, while Marie stood by, weak and dizzy.

"Stan' up—stan' up an' go!" she begged.

Again and again the wounded man tried, but always he tumbled at her feet.

Then the tears forced their way to the girl's eyes; she understood at last that she was helpless, while the police were on her husband's trail. She sat down wearily by the faint embers of the fire, and waited.

Higher and higher the winter sun climbed in the heavens. Drip, drip, drip! the snow melting, in its heat, dropped to the crust beneath. Silence in the timber—deep silence. The puppies played outside, their sharp yelping echoing

among the stalwart trunks and dark-green recesses.

"Hurrah!" And again, "H-u-r-r-a-h!"

With many whoopings and yells the mounted police came to the clearing again. Lashed securely behind a trooper was Jean Baptiste. They had him cornered in a blind gorge behind the mountains and captured him.

Stillness reigned in the wigwam as they approached. McPherson slipped from his horse and looked in.

"Whisht, b'ys; there's a chyild amang 'em nou!"

The other five dismounted and slid Baptiste from the horse.

"Strange, lads, that he ain't wounded! Sure we saw blood 'way out t' other side o' Mackenzie Mountain!" They searched the prisoner for a wound, but not even a scratch rewarded their efforts, Jean meanwhile standing mute and firm before them.

"Well, we got him, anyhow," one policeman said cheerfully, "woun' or nae woun'; but 'tis vera, vera cur'ous, na'theless," he finished in a whisper.

As the police talked and built a fire, Gwin-

guish, inside the tepee, heard, understood, and staggered to his feet. His head troubled him frightfully, but in the corner his bleared eyes saw the girl, and, tottering body and soul as he was, he understood what she had done for him. He fell to his knees, then rolled over, picked himself up again, dragged his body the length of the tepee, and crawled out.

"What's this? An', i' faith, 't is Baptiste!" the sergeant said; then, seeing the blood-soaked neckerchief over the forehead—"but the girrl said he'd hurted his foot."

Gwinguish, by an awful effort, got to his knees. Jean stood silent and grave, looking at him.

"No Baptiste me. Me Gwinguish you shoot yes'day; de girl, hees *eqwe* [woman], she tell you me heem; he try for let me get 'way. Ah 'm *m'guetch* [thanks] to heem; tak' me—no heem!" The body of the senseless man sagged between Baptiste and the sergeant.

"I'll be clean damned!" the latter muttered.

Unnoticed, Saunders, the youngest of the force, thumbed his report-book. "Lads, it's Christmas Day."

The sergeant looked up quickly. "Christ-

mas, did ye say? I would nae hae thought it."

Every man was silent. From within the tepee came the faint wailings of a new-born child. Jean Baptiste must have heard, but he gave no sign. The wounded man tossed and muttered incoherently.

"Loose him, men!"

Jean was free.

"I'm a lang, lang way from th' Hielands, lad! but God bless ye—an' a merry Christmas!" the sergeant said hoarsely. "Mount, men! Ride!"

Plud-a-plud, plud-a-plud, plud-a-plud! The horses' feet, striking the soft snow, sounded fainter and fainter and fainter; then they were gone.

"Dieu merci!" and Jean stepped over the unconscious Indian and disappeared in the tepee, while the mid-winter sun shone its short hours over the great wilderness.

The Black Thing of Hatchet Lake

The Black Thing of Hatchet Lake

A French-Canadian Legend

"CURSE the wind!" John Arnold muttered angrily, as he looked over the ruffled waters of Hatchet Lake.

He stood on a clay bank that overhung the water; at his feet it was mirror-like, but beyond ripples on ripples hurried away, growing in size till on the other shore the blue distance was spotted with the white crests of waves that gleamed in the vague sunlight.

"Curse the wind!" he repeated; "we'll never get them damned sticks acrost!"

As he spoke, his eyes turned to the boom of logs that was kedged under the protection of a long point. Thousands of them were there, lying brown and half-submerged in the water.

"Breakfus', Jack!" shouted one of the men of a group that moved about a brightly blazing fire on the beach a few yards away.

Arnold went back slowly, his face wrinkled in an ugly frown.

"More blow, Jack, eh?" said a big lumberman to his boss.

Arnold growled something, and began helping himself to "salt horse" and potatoes.

"Tarnation, thar goes that dory!" one of the crew shouted, leaping to his feet.

The dory in question had worked off the beach with the wind and drifted away fast; the man waded after it to his armpits, but he was too late. "Thar's a skunk o' a tramp arter her now," he grumbled, as he dripped ashore.

Arnold rose deliberately, took off his heavy jacket and kicked the awkward "corks" from his feet.

"Don't be er fool, Jack; th' water's ice-cold!" the man advised, as the foreman walked to the edge.

"I'll git that thar dory or breakfust in hell!" he called, and plunged in.

He swam strongly, and was gaining on the boat, when he suddenly threw up his arms and sank without a cry.

The men gasped and looked at each other. Then several threw off their reefers and swam

out, braving the freezing chill, but found nothing; and it was a solemn crowd that finished their meal on the beach after that.

"He'll breakfus' whar he said he w'ld, sure 'nough!" Dick Donald announced gravely.

The others nodded in silence.

* * * * * *

"'Ow mooch you geef for me to tak' dat lettre dam' queeck to you' fren'?" Batiste Clement asked slowly, as he rubbed tobacco between the palms of his big hairy hands, preparatory to filling his pipe.

The lumbermen's little store was hot and close; river drivers, teamsters, choppers, men of rough life and endurance, squatted about, smoking. The one oil lamp that hung low from the dingy ceiling gave out a pallid light, scarce strong enough to create shadows.

"I'll give any man twenty-five dollars to take this message to Nixon, camped on Beaver Pond," a young man, evidently a sportsman, answered quickly.

The crowd shuffled and waited for Clement's answer.

The latter, a brawny French-Canadian, looked down on the man from civilization, and

grinned. "Eet fef'ten mile to Lac au Portage, ten mile down de rivière, t'ree mile to portager roun' de bad water, twent' mile h'across Hatch't Lac, den four mile by de trail; 'ow far all dat, Tonee?" he asked of the storekeeper.

The latter added up on his fingers. "Fifty-two miles, Bat!"

"Ah go," the big fellow decided, "an' Ah go by dam' ver queeck! Be bac' en two day a half, mabbe t'ree day ef beeg win'."

"Look out not to strike Hatchet Lake at night, Bat!" one of the men laughed; "Jack Arnold's hangin' 'bout thar yit!"

The others winked.

"Bah, dat Jacko! Ah heer all taim' Jacko; v'at he do, hein?" Batiste asked good-naturedly.

"He's liable ter do most anythin' to ye," the same man answered; then continued impressively, "They sent a crew up thar last spring ter look fur him, an' they sot off dinamite an' fired guns an' grappled, but they didn't find nawthin'; he's thar, sartin', an' he never did hev a great *likin'* fur ye, since th' time ye licked him so bad at th' mill."

"Sacre-e-e! Ah lak' see heem, he no beeg mans v'en he h'alive, no can be mor' beeg dead!"

Batiste tucked the letter he was to deliver under his shirt, and carefully stowed the money in a little bag that hung on his massive chest.

"Au r'voir!" he shouted, and left the store.

His employer followed him to the river. "Hurry up, Clement; the man's wife is sick."

"Dat dam' bad; Ah go plent' queeck!"

He threw his food-bag and a blanket in the light canoe, pushed off, stepped in, and disappeared instantly in the night gloom.

On down the river he paddled with long, powerful strokes, humming to himself sometimes, sometimes whistling. The dark banks and somber shadows passed swiftly, and the sluggish current gurgled mysteriously from beneath half-sunken logs and rotting brush.

The night was sullen; the skies overhung with dense masses of moving cloud. At intervals a few stars shone from the upper heavens, but they were soon hidden. A light breeze sported on the river, baffling and weak; now it blew against him, then helped him on. Scr-a-a-c! Scr-a-a-c! croaked a heron as it flapped away from a marsh with audible swishing of its wings.

Splash! Ker-pluck! A musk-rat, startled by

the silently moving canoe, dived loudly, and came up ahead of it, only to dive again, more frightened than before.

"By gar, musquash ver' plent'," Batiste said to himself; "Ah mak' de trap baim'-by."

In three hours he came out of the river on to Portage Lake; the wind was stronger here, but it was favorable, and he paddled on fast. The shore behind him faded from a dark outline to nothingness, and he was alone on the whispering lake. Soon little waves moved the canoe up and down, and from the bow came the purlings of disturbed waters. Off to the right a loon called eerily, then liquid stillness; the next time it screamed with a quavering falter at the end.

"Beeg win' to-mor'!" and Clement hastened on.

As mile after mile passed under him the wind increased, lifting the black waters into long undulating waves; then these had crests that broke around the canoe with wet snarls and hissings. He could not see them, but he felt their power as he bobbed on, often dampened by the spray of a high sea as it curled itself spitefully against the stern of the canoe.

"H'eet mak' day!" he muttered, when a faint

light crept out of the eastern horizon. It grew stronger and stronger; at first green-gray, then yellow and pink; showing up the angry waters and far ahead the outline of a distant shore.

Then the sun rose lazily in the island-clouded sky. It gilded the swaying canoe, painted the man in soft colors, and brought out the forests in dark green hues. To the right and left mountains appeared, first indistinct, then solid against the fleeing night-clouds, at last clear and distance-blued.

Behind Batiste the shining wave-peaks curled along, breaking into foam that vanished for an instant to grow again in fresh and sparkling white. Before him were moving, heaving waters, but their crests were invisible. The warmth fused him to a sense of geniality, and he sang as the strong blow helped him on.

"Ah'm hongree!" he decided, and went ashore.

He landed on a tiny beach of yellow sand. There were many tracks of deer on it, and a few loup-cervier trails. When he had gathered some wood and built a small hot fire, he set his pannikin on it and explored. At the farthest end of the beach were the heavy footprints of a bear.

"Par Dieu, Ah get dat ours som'taim'," he shouted gayly, as he followed it into the woods. The trail led through an alder swamp, and the five-claw track showed plain and aggressive in the damp earth.

"Bon! Dat bear he leef h'at de cascades," he thought, and turned back to the shore. His tea was ready, and he sipped the bitter stuff, munching cold moose-meat the while, with great comfort.

"De voman's seeck, he tol' to me; Ah go!" he said aloud, as he finished, packed the food-bag, and shoved off. In a short time he reached the outlet; the water was fast, and in places white with rapids. Skillfully he guided the canoe past jutting reefs, between cold glancing water shoulders, and over rolling foam-covered bars, till he came to the dead water below. Then he went ashore again, emptied the canoe of the river that had lapped in, pushed off and kept on.

"Where dat portage?" he whispered to himself, as the distant roar of a fall sounded thick and muffled. He searched the left bank carefully as it slid past.

"Ha, dere ees!" as a bush-grown opening showed. He steered to it with swift strokes,

pulled his little craft out, lashed the bag, the blanket and the paddle to its thwarts, and hove it on his broad back. With loose knees and gracefully swaying shoulders he lugged over the three-mile carry, and rested only when Hatchet Lake stretched away before him, twenty miles to the far shore.

He sat down on the canoe and got out his pipe, his eyes wandering over the gently moving waters. They looked cold in the autumn sunlight, and troubled by the October wind that blew invigoratingly from the northwest. On both sides of him the forests fell away in dwindling lines of multi-colored hues; the solemn green of the fir and pine, the bright yellows of the birch, and up on the hillsides the red and purple of the maple and oak; two lines of shades and shadows as big white wind-clouds drifted over the face of the sun. Gray blotches hurried across the lake, distinct and silent.

"By dam', dat win' he blow h'agan me; Ah try go jus' sam'!" Batiste said aloud, and pushed out. He threw his jacket in the bottom of the canoe, tossed his cap after it, and bent to the paddle. The wind increased steadily, till at last, with all his great strength, he could forge

ahead no farther than the gale forced him back between each stroke.

"Sacre diable!" he grumbled, and swung back. The wind drove him rapidly ashore again; he leaped out and carried the canoe on the bank beyond the water, that tumbled with liquid rumblings and cold splashes on the big shale.

"Dat eternellement dam' win'!" he ejaculated, as he threw himself on the fresh-smelling pine needles and rustling dead leaves. He lay there, his long arms clasped behind his head, watching the furious lake, and waiting for it to become tranquil again in the evening.

Branches crackled and snapped sharply in the woods; withered leaves dropped from baring forest limbs, and scurried away, eddying and pirouetting among the stalwart trunks. A large fish-hawk, its wings set, sailed into his view, and he watched its long curvings idly. Round and round, now high in the air, then low, it moved by unseen power. Its distant, hoarse call came faintly to him, and he smiled.

"Hongree, hein?" and he laughed as the bird plunged, a bit of brown and white against the blue, into the lake, and flapped its way up again with empty talons.

"De trouts, dey no sooch beeg fool!" he called to the hawk. Once, twice, thrice it dived; at last a glittering fish squirmed in the sharp claws, and with a parting screech the bird wheeled and vanished over the tree-tops.

Clement smoked and dozed all the morning; then as the sun stared in his face on its downward course he built a fire and ate.

The sun fell slowly, turning from dazzling white to orange, from orange to pink-red, then crimson; bloody it seemed as it neared the tinted waters. Streaks of feathery masses moved more slowly from west to east as the wind died away and the waves sank, weak and crestless. Long ropes of cloud crept over the forest line beyond, and warped themselves in fantastic knots and twistings across the evening skies.

"Go now!" Batiste decided, put his canoe in the lake and started out.

"Dees good, dam' fine, allez fas'!" he muttered, and worked hard. The shores disappeared behind as the miles were passed and night settled down. The wind had gone entirely, and when the stars scintillated into view the waters were ink-hued and calm, a monster mirror for the myriads of twinkling points above.

Batiste coughed tentatively and cleared his throat,—

> For dere en Canada dere ees one girrl for me,
> Shee ees de finest vomans dat evaire you deed see,
> Wit haire lak' gol', an' eye so-o-o blu-e-e,
> Shee vait forr me, shee good an' tru-e-e!

His strong, clear voice carried far over the still surface, faintly echoing to him from the nearest shore,—

> Som' day to dees girrl lak' dees to her Ah say,
> You marrie me, dat so, an' 'appy den we stay
> H'at Lac des Loups togedder, you an' me-e-e;
> Dees leetle girrl, her nam' lak' dees Marie!

"Rie—rie!" the echoes flung back at him.

"Dat's v'at Ah say—MARIE!" he shouted merrily.

"Rie—rie—ie!" was the answer from over the flat water.

The stars gave a mystic light on the lake: that light in which objects are seen but not recognized; when forms are but indistinct shapes, and shapes but vague outlines.

Clu-u-uck — thump! Clu-u-uck — thump!

sounded his paddle regularly, while little bubbles and tiny rolls marked his water trail.

"Bon Dieu, v'at dat?" he whispered suddenly, holding the ash blade still.

To his right, close by, loomed a long point of land, its trees silhouetted unevenly against the night heavens. At the edge of the water a Black Thing oscillated evenly from side to side, now upright, then bending almost to the surface.

"Onlee tree!" he laughed, but was sober instantly. "By dam', no win'!" he breathed, staring motionless.

The silence was superb; his canoe had lost its headway, and lay quiet. Batiste was close to the point now, and the giant forest on it was as carved of stone. Not the faintest whisper disturbed the gripping stillness. Only the Thing moved, and it swung to and fro in dizzying sweeps. Clement looked in curiosity at first, then he remembered.

"Jacko!" he mumbled softly, and watched spellbound, helpless. IT was blacker than the night; sharp in its density, standing out clear and menacing from the heavily somber background of underbrush and pine.

"Bon Dieu! Jacko!" he spoke dully, and fumbled under his shirt; when he drew out his hand it held a little cross, that gleamed metallic in the star-darkness; he shook it toward the point.

"By gar, you see dat?" he called, and instantly the Black Thing disappeared. He stared in fascination.

"Merci, bon Dieu!" he said weakly, and in the relaxation of the fear his hand opened.

Plu-uck! The cross was gone under the lake. He watched the little ripples stupidly, then looked up, and the Thing met his eyes, oscillating as before.

For an instant he gazed, then screamed in his terror, and paddled away with all his might. The canoe trembled under the furious strokes, and parted the waters with foam at the bow and surging eddies at the stern.

Batiste looked over his shoulder in a few moments, and saw the Thing following on scarce three canoe-lengths behind. He threw himself on his knees, and paddled with the wild energy and strength of despair, whither he knew not nor cared. But always when he looked back IT glided after him, tall, silent, and swaying.

Absolute terror controlled him then; he worked on savagely, streams of sweat rolling from his face, his body a mass of tired muscles; but hard as he worked and agonizingly as he strove, the Thing was ever three canoe-lengths astern.

Then his strokes grew weaker and weaker, his breath came in harsh gasps and hoarse whistlings. The lake seemed to whirl round; the heavens and waters mingling and falling about him. His fear-cringed eyes flashed defiantly for an instant as he felt himself exhausted.

With a yelping shout he flung his paddle from him; it fell, splashing loudly.

"Dam' you, Jacko! Ah go wit' you to de diable," he grunted, as the canoe slackened speed gradually.

* * * * * *

Just as the next sun warmed the morning air, and kingfishers shrilled harshly on the shore, a canoe came up Hatchet Lake, manned by two Canadian trappers on their way to the fur country beyond.

"Dat one *canot,* hein?" the man in the bow asked of the other; they held their paddles and

gazed at something that floated brown and motionless to their right near the long sharp point.

"Ai-hai," the other answered in a moment; "she get 'way f'om som' mans; vee catch!" And they went over to it.

"Grâce Dieu!" the man in the bow whispered as he came alongside. The other looked and breathed sharply; they both took off their caps.

Stretched out on the bottom of the drifting canoe was Batiste Clement, his limbs straight and stiff, his face drawn into a half-snarl, his eyes open and glaring, and little flecks of dried foam on his lips.

"Tak' heem h'ashor'," Josephe Hebert said solemnly; and while his companion held on to the death canoe, he paddled slowly ahead.

"Jesu Christ!" he screamed then, and pointed at the water. The other looked and turned gray. Submerged all but the face, that shone green-white in the sun's rays, was a body; it wobbled soggily on the little waves created by Josephe's paddle.

"Sainte Vierge, dat Jean Arnauld! He drown few mont' gon' h'on dees pointe!" he whispered. The two sat staring.

"Par Dieu, dees place no good stay!" the

man holding on to the canoe muttered, and gave it a shove backward. It went a short distance and stopped across the floating body, hiding it.

Without a word the two put on their caps, grasped their paddles and hurried away, the wet blades flashing in the sunlight.

Wa-gush

Wa-gush

THE north wind flung itself wildly, viciously over the gray barrens; shrieking and whistling, it passed into the dark forests beyond.

A lone figure, urging on his dog team, sometimes pushing the sledge behind them when the snow was soft, struggled slowly across the mournful distances.

"Sacrée, Ah no get to de Poste dees night," he murmured.

As though in answer to his words the dogs stopped, panting, their feet bleeding, their eyes half closed; worn out with the weight of their load and the killing softness of the snow.

The man, Phiné Poleon, straightened up and looked about, while the wind tore at his clothes, bellowed in his ears and slung the biting drift over him. Everywhere loomed the solitude of the winter barrens; everywhere the snow flew along in tumbling clouds; ever and always the gale shrieked in gusts. The dogs had lain down

together, creeping to one another that their warmth might keep off the fury of the storm.

"Ah mus' get to de fores'," Phiné said aloud, took up his whip and curled the thong about the tired brutes.

"Allez! allez! Marse!"

They got to their feet painfully and started on, he helping from the rear.

At last, after hours of fighting against the whirling snow, he came to the forest. Tall, black and grim the hemlock and pine stood before him, their tops pirouetting wildly in the wind.

In their shelter Poleon halted, built a lean-to, gathered some dry wood and lighted his fire. The flames ate their red way speedily, and roared their heat to the coldness of the air.

After supper he fed the dogs, rolled himself in his rabbit-skin blanket and slept.

It was nearly daylight when he woke, his mind roused to action by the feeling of the presence of something. He got up, started to call the dogs, when the gleam of a fire in the forest below arrested his voice.

"Who's dere?" he muttered.

In yellow lines of light that flickered and

shone, the other fire gleamed warmly. His own had gone out.

"Ah go see!" and he went, stealing from tree to tree, the sound of his feet crunching in the snow covered up by the noises of the angry night.

By the brightly blazing fire were two figures close together, a man and a woman. Her face he could not see for the dancing shadows.

"Dat ees Le Renard," he whispered, recognizing an old comrade in the man. He was about to go forward when the woman rose and passed behind the other figure. Poleon saw the flash of steel, but could not hear the groan. He saw the body roll over and twitch convulsively.

"Bon Dieu, w'at you do?" he shouted, leaping on. The woman saw him coming and darted away in the blackness, seizing a pair of snowshoes that were near as she ran.

"D——n you," he cursed and tried to follow. He stumbled and slipped, then stopped breathless. Only the impenetrable mass of trunks met his eyes, their branches flapping monotonously to and fro.

"No can catch now," and he went back to the wounded man.

"Renard, w'at ees?" he asked frantically, tearing open his friend's capote and shirt. The latter opened his great black eyes for an instant.

"Dat—you—Poleon?"

"Si—si," the latter answered, trying to stop the flow of blood that reddened the snow.

" Ah'm—een—de—Pol—eece—dees—year ; catch mans for steal, he—go—Stonee—Montaigne;* dees girl—mak' me t'ink—she—loove—me; she sistaire dat mans!" the voice finished.

"Ah catch her sure!" Poleon screamed, seeing that his friend's death was near. "W'at her name? no could see her, me."

The dying trapper gasped and gurgled a moment, "W—g——" and died.

The dead man in his arms, the glazing eyes looking unseeing into his, Poleon crouched, dazed, horror-stricken. As in a dream, old scenes, memories of trapping days together, days that were fraught with success sometimes, sometimes burdened with failure, but always hours of companionship and a deep friendliness, passed before his memory eyes.

"An' now," he muttered sadly, "eet all feen-

*The penitentiary of the Northwestern Provinces.

esh forevaire." Then he stood up and took off his cap. "Bon Dieu, hear w'en Ah, Phiné Poleon, say dat Ah goin' keel dat girl somtaim!" He looked up at the heavens. They were dull gray and black with the coming light. Clouds sped over in banks and hurrying rifts. Gloomy, forbidding and cold they were.

He picked up the dead man and carried him to where his dogs were waiting, curled up, asleep. On top of the load of fur he fastened the stiffening form. Without breakfast or even a thought of food he crackled his whip.

"Allez—hoop!"

The half light in the forest showed the drifts and piled-up masses of snow, and the dogs worked slowly along. Weaker and weaker their pulls at the load became, then they stopped, powerless to pull more.

"W'at Ah do?" Phiné whispered, wiping the beads of sweat from his face. "Ah mus' leave Renard or my skeens."

He stood long, hesitating between the body of his friend and the fur he had collected from his traps; these meant money and food to him. At last—"Ah buree Renard," and he fell to work.

With his axe he dug through the snow and hacked at the frozen earth beneath, finally sinking a hole big enough for his purpose. Then he undid the lashings, lifted the dead man from the sledge, lowered him carefully, put back the earth, dragged the snow over the spot and stamped it down. Gravely he stood on it then, and said his Ave Maria twice, called to the team and turned away, tears in his eyes.

At night he reached the Hudson Bay Company's Post at Mistassiny and took his furs to the factor, receiving for them food and some money.

"'Tis a good thing ye got a fair lot this time," the Scotchman said as he examined the skins, "fur ye hae nae doun so well lately, Phin!"

But the big French-Canadian said nothing.

For days he fought with himself as to whether he should tell of the murder he had seen committed, because the Post was asking for Le Renard, but he argued, "Ah no know dat w'man; dey no b'lief me; mabbe t'ink *Ah* keel Renard," and he was silent.

The knife that he had found in his friend's back he kept. It was a peculiar blade, with a

moose-horn handle and a blunted haft. He would take it out when he was alone in his tepee and look at it, moisture in his gaunt eyes.

"Ef Ah onlee knew who deed dat!" he would whisper over and over again.

Each night before he slept he solemnly repeated his vow to kill the girl "somtaim," and each day he watched everything and every one about the Post furtively, but learned nothing. The questions about Le Renard faded away.

"He mus' ha' lost hisself," the factor said.

But Poleon knew and he chafed at his own powerlessness. All winter he worked on at his traps, and when spring came he had a good credit account at the store.

"Ah goin' be marry," he announced abruptly one day to the factor.

"Who?" the latter asked.

"Wa-gush." (Little Fox.)

"She is a fox, too," and the Scotchman chuckled, "but I hae nae doot ye can beat her well enou' to keep her frae foxin'," and he laughed aloud.

"Ah loove her, dat all I know," Poleon answered gravely and went out of the store.

On a glorious June day, when the trees were

green with springing life, and the air warm with the luxury of the coming short months of heat, Poleon was married to Wa-gush, the little Indian girl he had grown to love, if a rough mastership with a passionate adoration besides can be called love. All the Post were there, and when the Jesuit father pronounced his blessing, they cheered.

Wa-gush and Phiné took up their home in a large, fine tepee that Poleon had built for the occasion. The girl was slim, but strong in body, muscular and active. Her face was of the Chippewa type, with long, slender nose, aloe eyes, high forehead, straight black hair, tiny feet and hands.

"Dieu, Ah loove you!" Poleon whispered softly to her one night as the little supper fire flamed and spluttered at their feet. She looked at him and her eyes narrowed more than ever.

"An' Ah loove you!" she answered softly, tapping her beaded moccasins with a little stick. Poleon never beat her; on the contrary he carried the wood, built the fires, hauled the nets on the lake; in short, did everything that is usually done by the squaws—so much so that the Post laughed at him.

"Ye do love her, don't ye, Poleon?" the factor said one day sarcastically.

"Ai-hai" (yes), he answered.

All this time of great happiness with the girl, the old sorrow for his friend was working at his heart. He would sit by his fire, with her on the other side, and somberly dream, sometimes seeing the death picture, sometimes almost feeling Le Renard in his arms.

Often he tried to tell her of his pain, but at each attempt the words stuck in his throat. No, he could not make her unhappy, especially because they both hoped for a child. Unseen he would take out the knife and gloomily handle it, wondering, praying that some time he might have his vengeance.

The days passed on, one by one, each filled with its own particular happiness with Wa-gush, each bringing nearer the longed-for event. In the evenings, when his nets were hauled and the dogs fed, Poleon would take her out on the lake in one of his birch-bark canoes and paddle quietly along the warm, dark shores, startling the deer from their feeding, and listening to the lonely hoot of owls.

One night his sorrow was too great.

"Chérie," he said quietly.

"Ai?" She put her hand on his knee that rested on the canoe bottom.

"Ah have beeg pain!"

"Ai?" she said again, waiting.

He drew out the knife from his bosom.

"Dees kn'fe——" he began, when he heard the startled gasp, felt her shiver run over the canoe and looked up. In the moonlight her dusky face was white, and her eyes burned strangely at him. She controlled herself by a valiant effort.

"Ai?"

A wild thought flashed across him, and he remembered, could hear the dying man's attempt at a name: "W—g——"

She was herself again. "Tell to me?"

And he told her the story, watching, now that the iron was in his heart, with the keenness of a hound, but Wa-gush gave no further sign.

"Dat too bad, Poleon," she said when he finished; "you mus' fin' dat girrl an' keel!" Straight she looked at him and he stared back. No waver of an eyelid met his gaze.

"You t'ink dat?"

"Ai-hai" (yes), she answered steadily, and

they went home. More days passed, but now they were fraught with double pain to Poleon.

"It no can be dat!" he would say to himself when alone.

At supper one night the blanket at the entrance was pushed aside and a great Indian came in.

"Bo' jou', Poleon, bo' jou', sistaire, Ah comme f'om Stonee Montaigne, Ah'm free at las'!" and he sat down.

Poleon turned to the girl; she was watching him with a tense, hunted look.

"Ah-h!" he whispered, and talked on gayly.

She was lulled to carelessness, thinking he did not know, and when he suggested they go on the lake, the next evening, she got into the canoe quietly. The moon shone in all its glorious splendor, silvering the waters and causing the forest to appear as black lines. When at a distance from the Post, Poleon got out the old knife.

"You keel Le Renard," he said, with no anger in his voice, only an ineffable sorrow.

"Non—non," she answered, seeing the light in his eyes.

"Ah say yes, an' Ah'm goin' keel you!"

She begged for mercy as he put the paddle down.

"T'ink of you' petit," she whispered then; he crawled over the thwart.

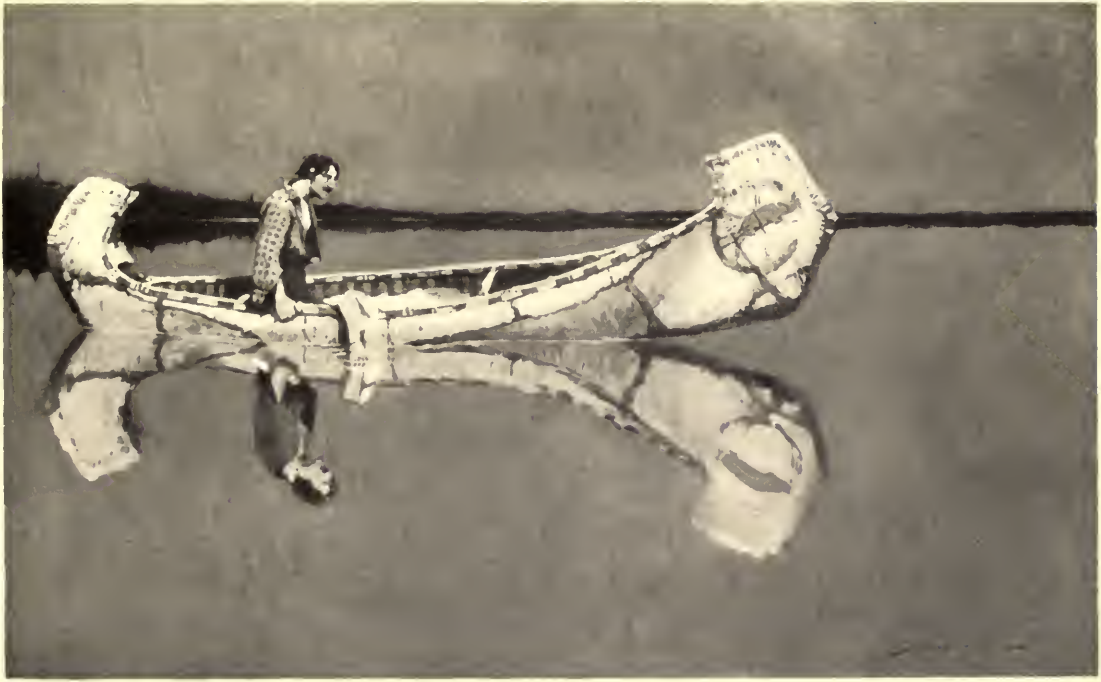
"Ah *am* t'inken," he said, and struck! The canoe trembled for an instant, then was quiet on the calm waters.

He looked at her, dead at his feet, her little hands resting over the side. The knife was still in his hands.

"Bon Dieu, Ah have keel lak' Ah say, now Ah keel h'again."

He thrust at his own chest with a powerful, heavy blow. "Adieu, Wa-gush, Ah alway loove you," he gasped as he fell, overturning the canoe by his weight.

The waters rolled away in sullen ripples after the splash; and the upturned canoe floated motionless and dark on the still, moonlit surface.



"Adieu, Wa-gush, Ah alway loove you," he gasped

Follette

Follette

BRISBOIS BRIÈRE took off his dogs' harness slowly. He was tired from the long trail and disappointed in the day's collection of fur.

"Sacre Dieu!" he muttered, throwing the last trace into a corner, "an' you, Follette, look mos' lak' womans som'taim!" He bent over one of the eight dogs that sat about his feet, staring fixedly into its face. The look was given straight back—unblinking and steely light gray the brute's eyes were.

"Tiens," Brisbois whispered, "tiens? Dere ees som't'ing fonnee een dose eye dat look comme ça!" He turned away, went out of the shed, leaving the dogs to rustle their beds into the pine needles and leaves.

The wild north land was deep with snow, and the forest about was somber; cold in the fading afternoon hours. The light wind that droned wearily away among the peaks of the hemlock and pine had the sting of the ice barrens. Brisbois stopped at the low doorway of his hut, looking at the skies.

Mass on mass, sluggishly turning and writhing, the snow clouds dragged across the tree-tops, vanishing only because forced on by the crowding banks behind.

To the left of the little clearing a trail led away somewhere into the northeast, its faintly discernible opening visible for but a few feet beneath the spreading branches. At the right, a winter road broke the evenness of the forest ring, but its bed was clean and even; unbroken by man or beast.

"Lisette," he called, going in.

"Hein?"

"Souper readee?"

"Baim-by, few minutes!"

He sat down by the little stove, and slowly drew off one moccasin. It dripped water over the bright floor.

"Tu Bris!" she laughed, noticing, "tak' h'off h'out side!"

"Bon, Lisette."

The big Canadian stalked to the door again, leaned against the jamb, pulled off the other moccasin, wrung it dry in his powerful, massive hands.

"Stockeeng aussi?" he asked, smiling.

"Non." She turned from her fry-pan on the stove. "For toi Ah mak' clean de floor!"

He took two steps, huge they were, reached her side and kissed her.

"Dat's paie for do eet!" and he laughed, the great sound filling every nook and corner of the cabin, reverberating within its cramped walls.

"Tu mauvais!" she smiled, unconsciously arranging the great masses of black hair that coiled loosely on her head.

"La!" She put hot moose steaks on the tiny table; these were cut thick, and the red juice eddied about them in the deep tin plate. Warm bread, steaming tea, and molasses followed.

He began eagerly, while she watched, a glow of pleasure on her strong, yet pretty, face.

"C'est bon, hein?"

His mouth full, another piece on his fork, he looked up.

"Dat de bessis' een le Canadaw! You mak' eet, dat 'nough for me, Lisette!" He chewed hard and swallowed.

"Méchant!" she murmured, softly.

"Com'! Eat den!" he ordered; she sat down opposite to him, and they ate together, he watch-

ing her furtively, she noticing each mouthful he took.

No sound for a few moments, but the clatter of knives, the harsh rattle of tin forks on tin plates, the great sucking gulps that Brisbois took of the tea (his mouth crammed with bread each time), but she didn't care, as long as he had what he wanted.

After supper, he stretched himself indolently on a rabbit blanket near the stove, lighted his pipe and smoked in silence—thinking. Lisette cleared away the plates, brushed the table clean with a spruce bough, and sat by him.

For a time all was still, save for his draws on the pipe and the exhalations of thick blue smoke. The cabin was dark; only the sheen of the red-hot stove-cover broke the pall.

"Lisette!" taking a breath of clear air.

"Hein?" She waited, listening.

"You kno' dat Follette ees som't'ing crazee weet her eye'z?" He smoked again.

"Non; Ah no see 'tall." She waited again.

"Si! Dat chienne hav' drôle look een face! Ah see eet dees aftairenoon, near to Lac de Près. Ah was for mak' de trap dere; no see good place; ask self, 'W'ere'; by gar, turn roun', see Follette

leesten', an' she ronne h'up de wataire to Cariboo cross'n; stan' dere den! Ah mak' trap; to-mor' go see eef catch som'ting; by gar, Ah t'ink dat chienne she leesten!"

The girl laughed merrily, "Tu Bris, *mon* gar, you tink tings curious all 'taim; not'ing dere! Follette, she no know w'at you say, onlee Marse! Allez!"

"Mabbe!" he answered slowly. "Mabbe." They sat in stillness then, he smoking calmly, she with half closed eyes.

"Ah'm go bed!" she whispered, and crawled into the big bunk.

The great Canadian paid no attention, smoking on.

Of a sudden he sat up, shoved his pipe under the stove, crept carefully to the door and listened. 'Way out among the forests echoed a strange wild cry. It rang and rang, cutting the black stillness sharply.

"W'at dat?" he breathed.

No wind, no sound—nothing.

"Ah drream, hein?" he turned back, when again the eerie sound filled the silence of the forests with its piercing volume. As he listened, breathing fast now, the call came oftener,

each time nearer—still nearer. Brisbois was frightened.

"Dieu an' Sainte Vierge," he muttered, "dat le Ninivoshi!" But he stayed by the door.

Then everything was quiet. Not a crackle of a branch, not a soft step on the snow, not a whisper of living thing came to his straining ears. Long he waited and watched, his eyes wide open; keen with a trapper's keenness. Nothing but shooting stars, and the glowing Northern lights met them. The vast trees stood motionless as images carved into the dark blue scintillating heavens.

"Bah!" he whispered then, and "Bah!" again. "Ah'm tire h'out an' h'ave bad t'ink!"

He went in, curled up beside the girl and slept deeply while the dark hours passed on.

* * * * * *

The next morning it was snowing hard. From far up in the low skies the white flakes tumbled and whirled, eddied and circled. Brisbois woke, saw the girl still asleep, crawled out of the bunk quietly and lighted the fire. He went to the door.

"Misere," he muttered, then cursed. "Dam'

dat snow! She come w'en Ah wan' find h'out som't'ing!"

As he pulled on his coarse stockings and moccasins, still damp, she opened her eyes.

"Et tu?" sleepily.

"Go 'sleep, Lisette; Ah'm mak' dejeuner; goin' Lac des Près, be back een h'aight—ten hour mabbe."

She turned under the blankets and slept again.

He cooked a slice of caribou meat, fried a bit of pork, gulped some tea, inhaled a few whiffs of his pipe, and went out to the dog-shed. The brutes leaped round him, licking his hands, but none so caressingly as Follette, the bitch leader of the team. He fed them one by one; they didn't fight; they knew him, and the result. Brisbois watched them eat, and chuckled grimly.

"Eef Ah no giv' you for food, w'at h'appen, hein?"

Seven paid no attention, but Follette looked up quickly from the dried fish she was tearing, and whined. The trapper started back involuntarily.

"Dieu! She on'stand!" he whispered.

When they had finished, he harnessed them to the light sledge.

"Allez! Marse!" Away the eight went, Follette in the lead, pulling valiantly. Two hours passed, he sitting on the sledge sometimes, sometimes striding beside it on his snowshoes. They came to Caribou Crossing.

"Merci donc!" he said aloud, seeing a black fox in his trap. He carefully sprung the steel jaws, releasing the long, lithe body.

"Dat fine!" he muttered in ecstasy, smoothing the black hairs, unbending the rigid limbs.

Something disturbed his happiness and triumph. He looked down and saw Follette's gray eyes on him, and he remembered that by her insistent pawings at Caribou Crossing, he had set his trap where she indicated, and—the choicest fur of the forests was in his hands.

"By gar, ef you no hav' show to moi w'ere for mak' de trap Ah no got dees!" he whispered, a superstitious fear creeping over him. He was fascinated by the intelligent gleam in the dog's eyes.

"W'at, you?" He sprang at her, shaking her by her long, rough coat.

"Dieu!" he screamed then, as she licked his hands. "W'at you? Tell, hein?" She turned from him, settled in the traces and waited.

"Allez! Marse!" He flung himself to the sledge, already coated with snow.

The team went on and on obediently, first to the right, then to the left, as he directed. Then he stopped them. As far as his eyes could reach were wavering, trembling drifts. No wind moved the flakes—they eddied by their own weight. The silence was drear; only the seething of falling snow came to him. He tried this way and that, then gave it up.

"Ah'm los'! Oh, bon Dieu!" Sweat burst from his forehead, and froze there as it came into contact with the bitter air. An unutterable sadness dropped into his eyes; he caressed the black fox, muttering hoarsely.

"An' weet dees Ah wass goin' de Ligne, got two—t'ree hun'er dollaires for mak' present Lisette!" He looked round, agony and loneliness in his face. "Ah'm *no* los'!" He cursed then fiercely, started the team and traveled for a long time, twining his slow way in the bewildering drifts. No familiar landmark could he find—nothing but the mercilessly falling snow that heaped on his shoulders heavily. He realized that he was absolutely lost. He stopped. Gently piling on him, coldly embracing him,

the great flakes came in silent myriads, dropping from the skies with coquettish motion. Here, there, everywhere, was the same death-like stillness.

The snow seemed to know, and gathered about his legs, climbing upwards inch by inch. He shook it off, turning his head dazedly to the four points of the world. Then he knew that he was face to face with death, and he idly wondered how long he could withstand the cold. The knowledge of what death meant, numbed his mind.

"Ah starve h'ere!" he groaned—and felt a warm tongue on his hand.

"Follette?"

The brute licked on appealingly, looking at him with the same steady gray eyes.

"W'at?" he spoke aloud, unconsciously.

She yelped, started off to the north-east, came back, licked his hands again and squatted on her haunches, staring at him.

He thought hard.

"B'en, allez, Follette! Marse vous autre'!"

Into the north-east they went, the leader straining every muscle.

"Dere ees de beeg pine!" he shouted with

relief in a few hours. Follette looked back and yelped.

Some time later he reached his home, stabled the team, fed them bountifully and took the black fox in the cabin.

"Qu'est magnifique!"

The girl cried out, seeing the gorgeous fur.

"An' Ah'm los' eef no for dat Follette!" he announced gravely.

Tears came to her eyes as he told how he had been saved.

"An' she mak' eet so Ah catch black fox aussi!"

A silence then. The interior was shadowed by the coming of night. Corners lost their outline, the roof seemed farther away, the bunk a vague big thing.

"Par Dieu!" he worked his great hands together till their joints cracked. "Dat chienne ees de fines' in Canadaw; een monnaie, mabbe hun'er feefty dollaires, hein?"

The girl looked at him with surprise and sorrow.

"You goin' sell Follette aftaire w'at she h'ave do for you? Bah!" She swung away. "Ingrate!"

He stared at her, not understanding her point of view.

"Mais, cherie, ef Ah get hun'er feefty dollaires, dat paie de debte au Hodson Baie Compagnie." He was hurt that she couldn't understand him.

"You h'ave mor' beeg debte to Follette," she answered slowly. "Tak' de black fox an' paie Hodson Baie."

"By gar, dey no geef not'ing 'tall, mabbe debte, pas plus, an' black fox breeng two—t'ree hun'er dollaires at de ligne!"

Lisette shrugged her clean-cut shoulders and lighted the candles. They had supper. Neither spoke often; he trying to make his rough, simple mind see what she wanted; the girl, with a woman's quick sentiment and sympathy, revolting against selling this dog that had done so much for her.

When his pipe was drawing well, the stove sending out a luxurious warmth, the table cleared, she sat down on the blanket beside him, and worked a small brown hand into the huge fist that lay at rest on his knee.

"Bris!"

"Hein?" He looked down at her kindly.

"No sell Follette, for me?" She edged closer; then put her head on his giant shoulder.

He stared for a time into the open draught-holes of the little stove, and the red reflection of the wood coals glittered dreamily in his eyes.

"Non!" He rubbed the black bowl nervously. "Ef you no want me for sell Follette, Ah no sell!" And he smoked again.

"Merci, Bris." She came still closer to him, and his long, gaunt arm encircled her. Thus they sat in peace.

A knock.

"Who ees?" he asked, leisurely standing up, taking his arm away unwillingly.

"Osasquinini," came a heavy, powerful voice.

"Dat Indian, f'om Baie Terrible," Brisbois muttered, opening the door. A blast of wind, burdened with snow, whirled in as the tall, lanky Indian entered. He shook the white bits from his capote, took it off, threw it in a corner and went over to the heat.

"Bo' jou'—bo' jou'!" he said, quietly.

"Bo' jou'." Brisbois lighted his pipe as he spoke. "An' you, w'ere go?"

"Ev' place!"

The Canadian looked up, startled by the sadness in the other's voice.

"Hungree; giv' eat!" The Indian waited.

Lisette looked at her husband, he motioned, and she got cold moose meat, some bread and soggy flour cakes.

"Miguetch" (thanks). Osasquinini bolted the food. When it was all gone he squatted cross-legged on the blanket.

"Smok'?"

Brisbois took his pipe from his lips and passed it to the other.

"Miguetch!"

Puff—puff—puff from the Indian, no words.

"W'ere go?" Brisbois asked again.

The Indian, his emaciated face aglow, spoke monotonously.

"You white man, understand Indian?"

"Ai-hai" (yes), the Canadian answered.

"You want hear story?"

"Ai-hai!"

Stillness in the cabin, while the Ojibway warmed his long hands, smoking the while. Brisbois sat down.

"You know Indian belief? When dead, Indian turn into animal?"

"Ai-hai!"

"Long time ago, twenty-four moons, Osasquinini marry. Be marry eight moons. White man's sickness come to squaw. Osasquinini don't know what do. Squaw die!" The Indian's voice shook, and the guttural words of his language trembled at each utterance.

"Indian know she animal, Indian know she love him now—and—Indian cannot find. Osasquinini has searched everywhere, and called the language of the animals he knows. Was near here last starlight, calling to the wolves; no answer!"

The Canadian drew a deep breath, shuddering.

Lisette was staring at the bronzed face with breathless curiosity.

"An' squaw? W'at like?" she asked, in the jargon the Indians know.

"She was strong like the beaver, tall like the caribou, quick as the sable, clever as the fox." He stopped, smoking hard; then continued. "Osasquinini hunt everywhere for her. Can see only her gray eyes, can——"

"W'at say?" the girl interrupted fiercely.

The Indian looked at her contemptuously.

"Osasquinini get no help from white woman; he go!"

"Pash-ke-san!" [wait] she whispered, getting to her feet. Brisbois felt the Indian's power, and hers. He sat on. She went out into the wild night, struggled to the dog-shed.

"Follette," she called. A whimper, a rustling and the leader crouched at her feet.

"Marse!" she ordered, while the seven others growled and grumbled. She fastened the door on them; then led the way in the chilling snow-drifts, to the cabin.

"Viens, Follette!" she coaxed; the dog hung back.

"Viens, marse!" She stamped excitedly on the threshold; the brute followed her in then. She shrank behind the shadows of the bunk, watching.

Follette looked about, saw the Indian, leaped to him, crouching between his knees, her eyes on his face. He stiffened, leaned forward, and kissed the long mouth, smoothing the rough hair on her head.

Brisbois' face was white in the wavering candle-light.

"Dieu!" he whispered.

The Indian stood up, inch by inch, Follette at his knees.

"Osasquinini has found," he muttered. "Miguetch!"

He went to the door, Follette at his heels, her gray eyes fixed on him.

"Miguetch," the Indian said again slowly, and vanished into the stormy night, the dog following.

The Indian's Vengeance

The Indian's Vengeance

THE sun rose clear and strong over the silent forests, and shot long, golden paths on the sullen moving waters of the Albany River. It was mid-summer and the dark green of the fir and pine stood out in sharp relief against the lighter shades of the hardwood ridges. Far off a range of mountain heights loomed heavy and massive; a wavering line reaching up toward the pale, tinted skies. In a clearing, surrounded by alder bush and growing hemlock stood a little log hut; prim and severe it seemed in this blaze of forest color. Below it the river flowed silently on, its flat surface broken only by eddies, and burdened with white froth that floated down from the falls, whose roar came faintly through the trees. Two birchbark canoes were drawn on the shale, their yellow sides shining with the night's dew. The split-board door of the hut opened suddenly with a jerk; Jim Blake, trapper, stepped out.

"Tom said as how it 'ud be a fine day," he

yawned, stretching his long, wiry arms. He turned and stuck his head through the door.

"Tom! Tom! get up ye lazy scamp! Th' sun's hour high!"

Without waiting to see the result of his call Blake went down to the river, rolled up his tanned skin shirt-sleeves, and "washed." Having thoroughly spattered himself, snorted and gurgled he drew an old rag from under one of the canoes and made a pretense at drying his dripping face and hair.

"Gosh all hemlock, yer the orneriest cuss fur washin' an' swabbin' yer carciss ever I see!" Tom, his partner, shouted from the bank. The other peered at him through the holes in the rag.

"Bet yer life, but y' don't care how dirty y' are!"

"Naw, why fur? The more good old dirt the less blasted flies bothers," Tom answered, pulling on his long moccasins. "Whut 'll ye hev fur breakfus'?"

"Gol! I clean furgot thet our meenuu 'lowed much o' a choice in vittles." Jim clambered up the steep little bank and stood beside the other. Both large, raw-boned, powerful men were

these two that lived in the absolute wilderness, and both big-hearted, rough creatures of Nature's own making.

"Say, Tom"—Blake put his scarred hand on the younger man's shoulder—"honest, now d'y think thet Ah-teg stoled them furs? Kinder 'pears ter me thet As-sin-ab is the wust critter o' th' two." The other stared thoughtfully across the now white shining river.

"Wall, I dunno; Ah-teg is 'n bad company with thet other skunk Indian, an' I think as how we'd oughter go up an' larrup the two on 'em jus' on gineral principles." Jim laughed quietly.

"Le's eat fust." They went indoors, and while one shaved a bit of dry wood for kindlings the other got out the bread, salt and tea and a lump of pork. From a bag that hung outside he brought in some caribou meat, cut in long, thin strips; then he cooked on the little stove in which a bright fire crackled and snapped. The appetizing odors of frying meat soon filled the pine-scented interior, and particles of pork fat spluttered angrily on the hot metal.

"Damn, I put in too much tea!" and Tom made a dive with the tin spoon into the boiling

kettle. "Ouch, damn twict! I bu'nned meself!"

"Easy, son, easy; ye always jump too quick, an' when ye finds thet out ye jump ag'in, makin' two breaks 'stead o' one, see?"

"Shut up!" Tom growled good-naturedly, "'r I'll pour it all over y'!" The two then ate in silence, the rattling of the tin plates and cups sounding harshly loud in the little room.

Just as they were finishing two shadows fell athwart the rude table. Blake looked up.

"Damn if it ain't Ah-teg! An' who've ye got with ye?" he asked, seeing the tall, gaunt Indians standing impassive in the doorway. The one he had addressed moved forward and squatted near the stove. His keen, black eyes roved around, noticing everything.

"As-sin-ab," he answered, gutturally, waving his brown hand toward his companion, who sat cross-legged on the threshold.

Meanwhile Tom was clearing up the breakfast remains. Ah-teg reached out and took the meat that was left, tore it in two and threw a piece to his friend.

"We hon-gre-e," he said, as he munched slowly. There was a silence. Jim filled his

pipe and lighted it; Tom sat on the table swinging his legs. The Indians gravely wiped their hands on their leggings, then Ah-teg stood up.

"We come, Ogama [Chief], to ask white man counsel. Our medicine man no tell what Inssen-abe [Indian] want to know. In white man hunting-ground can Ogama an' fr'en' have same squaw?"

Blake smiled, then, not wishing to hurt the Indian's feelings, he answered gravely: "No, white man have squaw for himself."

"Miguetch" [thanks]. Ah-teg turned to go.

"Hold on a min'te, hev ye got any fur to trade?" Jim asked. The bronze face looked steadily at him.

"Ogama know no fur when Te-bek-te-ge-sis [noon] hot, an' Ah-teg no steal white man ad-ik [beaver]! Ah-teg see cache open when de leaf come out." With these words the Indian stalked out, his companion following closely, their light blankets fluttering in the breeze.

"Wall, wouldn't thet h'ist ye?" Tom said in amazement. "How in all tarnation did they know we suspicioned 'em of breakin' our cache?"

"They're pretty sharp, them Indians; I axed

Ah-teg too suddint like 'bout fur I guess. Shoo, thet's too bad altogether; thar ain't no use in tryin' ter find out now!" Jim sucked viciously at his pipe for a few moments.

"Where 've I see'd thet As-sin-ab afore?" he muttered to himself then.

"He looks a heap like one o' the critters we knowed down in th' Pine Creek country when we was workin' thar," Tom suggested. Blake leaped to his feet. "By thunder, son, ye're dead right! I recollect him now; he's the sucker thet won a quarter o' caribou when we was asleep, d'ye mind?"

"Sure!" the other answered, "an' I'll bet a week's fur thet them two broke our cache!"

"Cain't do nawthin' 'bout it, leastways not now, nohow!" and Blake spat angrily at the box. "Hell!"

They sat there idly watching the long grasses in the clearing wave and bow in the wind, and Jim's eyes became fixed on a mother sheldrake and her brood of young ones that disported themselves on the river in front of the hut.

"Fool bird," he whispered, but Blake heard.

"Why?"

"Don't know nawthin' 't all; wouldn't hev so

many little ones thet only get eat up by pike an' sich, if she did!"

"I'm a-goin' ter pull th' net; those dogs hain't had a bite since yes'erday mornin'," Blake said, got up, went down to the canoes, shoved one in the water and paddled off down stream. Tom still sat in his place on the table; suddenly he saw something shining on the floor where Assin-ab had sat. He went over and picked it up.

"Where 'd thet cuss get this?" he asked aloud, staring at the little round brass button in his hand; he looked closely at it, went out into the strong light and puzzled the dented surface into a meaning.

"R—N—W—M—P," he said, slowly. "R—N—W—M—P; why, holy smoke, this is a p'lice button, an' last winter one o' them fellers' hosses come in to Longue Lac alone; they didn't never find th' feller neither! Now, I—wonder if—— By golly, I'll bet my hand thet's it!" he shouted. A curious silence followed the sound of his voice. He felt it; even the wind lulled, and the grasses ceased waving. He ran round the corner of the hut, somehow feeling a presence. The alders were agitated; he rushed among them, and stopped, listening.

An instant's crackling, then deep stillness until the wind puffs whispered again among the boughs; beyond that—nothing.

"By G——, thet sneakin' devil come back fer to try an' git this!" he cursed as he went back. "Now I *know!*"

He sat on the bank, thinking it all over when Blake came back.

"Any fish?"

"A few trout, couple o' good ones an' a mess o' suckers."

Jim told the other the story of the button. Blake listened quietly.

"Wall, an' what kin y' do 'bout it? Ye cain't prove nawthin', not a damned thing!"

"I don't sepose we can, wuss luck, but I'll find out some day fer sure, see if I don't!"

They fed their twelve dogs, sewed some new moccasins for the winter, then traveled through the woods ten miles to the Indian camp. There was nothing there! Tepees all gone, only the tall, lonely frames standing in semi-circles were left.

Charred embers of the fires were still warm, tea leaves were still moist on the ground, that was all.

"Funny they lit out so suddint!" Jim said thoughtfully.

"Yep, thar's a row o' some kind on, sure!" and Tom's face looked worried.

Overhead great wind clouds whirled along, casting heavy shadows now and then over the empty camping place. A grove of high pines surrounded the spot, and the steadily growing wind whistled mournfully through the needled branches. The two went home again, and talked till long in the night.

The late summer months passed quickly, Tom and Blake blazing new trails, building traps, making snowshoes, and stiffening up their log cabin to withstand the furious winter storms and snows.

Thus the autumn came and went. The two laid in a supply of caribou and bear meat, so that when at last Jim woke up one morning to find the ground deep covered with white they were ready for it.

"I seed a long shoe track to-day, Tom," Blake announced, one night in January, as he came in from the bitter cold evening air. "Traps warn't tetched, though; did purty fair this trip," he continued, throwing off his fur bag.

"Whar d'ye see it?"

"D'ye mind th' place whar you an' me sot out thet bunch o' sable traps, all clost t'gether?"

The other nodded.

"Right thar, leadin' nigh onto sou'west."

"He must hev gon' ercrost th' Long Barren, then, 'cause thar ain't no way in this heft o' snow to git round either side."

"I guess thet's so." Jim pulled off his wet socks and woolen trousers. "I'm dog tired! Give us a snack, an' I'll bunk early."

They ate their supper, smoked a while, then darkness reigned within the little shelter, while a freezing moon moved slowly over the great white lonely North.

The next morning the two were off soon after light, each working his own trap lines. Tom was traveling south, toward the Long Barren, when he suddenly came across a sledge trail. He followed it a short distance.

"Who in hell is this?" he muttered, growing excited as he saw that the track led straight on for the Giant Split, as it was called, a deep crevasse between two rock ridges. "Damn fools, don't know much 'bout th' lay o' land!"

He followed a bit farther, then, as the sun

was getting down toward its chilling horizon, he turned back for home.

"Curse it all, Jim, I don't half like this bus'-ness; if it was squar' Indians, they'd come to us, 'cause they've seed our lines alright 'nuff!" he said, as the two sat at the stove side.

"I guess it's O.K., son; they hain't tetched none o' th' fur?"

"Naw, but I——"

He was interrupted by the sudden, quiet opening of the door; a blanket-shrouded and muffled figure came in, carrying snowshoes. The man unwound his coverings.

"How, Ogama." It was Ah-teg.

"Whut ye doin' round here?" Blake asked, keeping back the surprise he felt.

The Indian had moved up to the stove.

"Ah-teg come tell Ogama story." He pulled out an old clay pipe, lighted it. "Ski-di-wa-bo [whisky]?" Tom gave him a tablespoonful of their one bottle supply. The Indian puffed stolidly, then he looked up, and his eyes were flashing fire, though his voice was low and soft.

"Ogama rememb' when Ah-teg come, Assin-ab, too, for white man counsel?"

Blake nodded.

"Ogama rememb' counsel he give Ah-teg?"

Blake nodded again.

"Ah-teg, As-sin-ab want same squaw. Say do what Ogama counsel. Ogama say white man have one squaw self. Ah-teg get squaw, for Ah-teg heap rich Missen-abe in tribe. As-sin-ab took squaw, go way far, Ah-teg follow fast lak' de am-ik [caribou]. No find, no catch. See trail, follow all time. Near to dead, see?" He drew aside his long, beaded shirt and showed a body worn to skin and bone. Then he smoked again. The two listened as though in a trance, so magnetic was the soft, purring voice in which lurked the Indian's relentless vengeance.

"Ah-teg heap great think, follow more fast, drive As-sin-ab up mountain, no catch. Follow more, an' find to-day track of Ah-teg, his squaw, and As-sin-ab, where two fall in de mouth of land."

"Thet was their track I seed ter-day," Tom interrupted, eagerly. The Indian looked at him, and a grim smile fled across the thin, tight lips.

"Young Ogama lak' young eagle, mak' heap noise, no feathers, no fly!"

"Thar's an end to it, then, eh?" Blake asked, reaching for a match. His hand stopped half

way as the Indian rose. Fierce and wild he looked in the candle-light, standing there, his feet apart, his head thrown back, his long black hair falling in rigid lines about his pain-furrowed face. His eyes burned and glowed in their sockets, and his nostrils quivered like those of a well-bred horse.

"End, Ogama say?" The world of sarcasm in the ever-purring voice stung like a whip.

"Thet's what I said, end, and what can Ah-teg do?"

"Ah-teg can kill, kill, kill!" came the breathless answer.

"How, if they're dead in the Split?"

"Ogama no know that Missen-abe live like animal after dead?"

"Shucks, rot, hell, anything," Tom blurted out.

The tall Indian looked at him in withering contempt, then turned to Blake.

"Will Ogama lend Ah-teg gun?"

"What for?"

In majestic silence the Indian lifted his hand till the fingers pointed straight at the trapper.

"De Manito he tell Ah-teg dat As-sin-ab is fox now, an' dat Ah-teg squaw is Wa-ba-boos

[white rabbit]. As-sin-ab he kill man of Great White Squaw an'——"

"Th' p'liceman; I knowed I was right!" Tom rubbed his hands in glee. The Indian paid no attention.

"An' great Manito tell Ah-teg to shoot self in head, then Ah-teg be wolf and kill, kill, kill! Give—Gun!"

Hypnotized by the black eyes that stared through and through him, Blake reached slowly for the rifle, and handed it to the Indian. With a wild, ringing cry, Ah-teg cocked it, put it to his head, between his eyes, and pulled the trigger. He dropped, a lifeless heap.

The two stared; the silence was absolute.

"My God!" Tom whispered, in awe. "My God!"

All night they talked in whispers, not daring to move the body, so strong had been the Indian's power. At daylight Jim looked out. It had begun to snow, and the white particles floated down in silent myriads.

"We'd best go to th' traps this mornin', Tom; we'll lose fur if we don't; we can bury—him—this arternoon."

They started out together tacitly, neither car-

ing to be alone. Blake was in the lead as they came to the Split, which they had to cross. He stopped, shaking all over.

"Look," he muttered, hoarsely, "look!"

On the far side of the Split, just where a sledge trail led into the soft engulfing, choking snow, sat a timber wolf; it watched them steadily.

"At its feet, man, at its feet!" Tom whispered.

There, under the half-open jaws, with the drool dripping slowly on them, lay the dead bodies of a white rabbit and a fox.

The two turned and sped away, the lone great wolf watching them disappear in the snowy distance.

The Taking of Almighty Voice

The Taking of Almighty Voice

An Incident of the R. N. W. M. P.

"WHAT'S that moving?"

"Where?"

"Just between those two hills; see it? There it goes!"

The two Mounted Policemen stared at the rolling hills and valleys, purplish blue in the fading daylight.

"I see it, now!" Then silence.

The horses champed nervously at their bits, the tinkling of metal sounding loud in the quiet of the twilight prairie. Now appearing, then vanishing, then coming into view again, a moving mass crawled along, sometimes lost in the shadows, again strong in the high lights between the hills.

"Looks like cattle moving," Somers said then, slowly. The two watched on.

"It's cattle all right, but who'd be moving them at this time of night?"

Andrews, the other Constable, offered no suggestions.

Slowly the daylight dimmed. Shade by shade, shadow by shadow the twilight grew, enveloping the distances in vague misty hues. In the east a lone star glowed and twinkled brilliantly, sharp cut against the azure deep of the heavens.

"I'm going to see; you wait here," Andrews said, sharply, spurred his horse and cantered away.

Somers watched the easily loping horse, its rider lending himself gracefully to the motion, out of sight among the glooms.

"A late farmer, maybe Nicholls," he muttered, and dismounted. The horse stretched its neck to lengthen the reins, then nibbled daintily on the green spring grasses that carpeted the June prairies with long, luxuriant growth, so different from the blasted, stiff verdure of the summer months.

"It's too bad," he whispered on, "that there never is any excitement; in the good old days of Indian fights a man could find some fun now and——"

Crang—crack—crang—crang——

The spits of fire pierced the gloaming angrily; then a deep stillness reigned. Somers sought to focus his eye on the spot from which the tongues of flame had leaped. Nothing! He mounted quickly, and waited, listening. No sound disturbed the silences of the prairie night. Insect-eating hawks darted hither and thither with light swishing of wings; coyotes yelped here and there in the valleys; beyond these sounds—silence!

Somers waited and waited, his horse fretfully pawing, throwing its head up and down.

"By God! I must go, even if he ordered me to stay, as a superior." And away he went, carbine clattering against his saddle, spurs jingling.

"It's somewhere about here," he said aloud, after a good ride.

"Steady, girl, who-a, steady!" He slid off, hobbled the little mare and walked on.

"Who-e-e!" he called, putting forth the strength of his lungs in the wild, weird call.

No answer. Darkness, with its palls of black, hung heavy on the wastes. He lighted a match.

"Somewhere here those shots were fi——" He stopped and saw.

Huddled in a senseless heap was Andrews.

Frantically Somers felt the cooling hands, desperately he listened for a heart beat; but no beat came.

He stood up.

"Forty—fifty miles to barracks, but I'll do it before daylight," and he mounted.

Pound, pound, plud-a-plud sounded the mare's hoofs on the turf. Mile after mile passed under the swiftly-moving feet, and as daylight came faintly in the east Somers reached the Region Barracks.

"Andrews killed, sir!"

"What's that?" the Adjutant who was working late asked sharply, looking up from the sheaf of papers before him. Somers told the story.

"Yes, yes, cattle moving, Andrews went to investigate, shots, yes, yes, go on!" And Somers repeated what he had done.

"Four shots; go on!"

Then Somers told of having found the Constable's body, and of having left it there to bring the news.

"It's Indians, but I don't think they'll touch him now, sir," he finished.

"Right, quite right!" the Adjutant answered, pressing a button by his desk. An orderly came.

"Call the officer of the night!"

Lieutenant Roy appeared.

"You will order forty men into the saddle at once; Somers will guide you; find out who killed Andrews and take them, dead or alive!"

"Yes, sir." Roy saluted and disappeared.

"Nothing to eat, man, have you?"

"No, sir; but I'm all right, sir."

"Tush, nothing! Get something, tea, anything you like, but be ready in half an hour to start."

Somers saluted and went out into the barracks square.

The sun was barely creeping over the skyline when, his hasty breakfast finished, he mounted a fresh horse and was ready for work. Men ran hither and thither; horses whinnied and stamped; officers shouted orders; in short, the barracks were greatly excited.

"Fall in! 'Tention! By column, right fours, fours right, TROT!" and they were off.

Now and then the subdued sounds of conversation broke the monotony of the ride, but most of the time it was clickety-clack, clickety-clack, clickety-clack over the green prairie. The air was soft and sweet, and the gophers' whistles

came sharply through space. Clouds swung on overhead, while grasses rustled under the four-score hoofs, and a light breeze played through manes and tails, carrying fresh wilderness suggestions.

Somers rode beside Captain MacDonald, at the head of the troop.

"Bear a bit to the right, sir." The necessary orders were given and the file swung, then trotted on. Hour after hour passed as the rolling wild lands rose up and dwindled away in the rear. The sun climbed straight into the upper heavens and shone there brilliantly warm and soothing. The lonely buttes and sand-banks stood stiffly about, rigid lines of clay and earth. A hasty stop was made for lunch and to rest the horses, then it was "ride" again.

Late in the afternoon a long rise of hill country came into sight.

"That's the place, sir; beyond that nearest range of buttes."

MacDonald held up his hand, and the line of horsemen slowed, then stopped. The officer took out his glasses and looked long and carefully.

"It seems to me there is a haze over there,

across that high ridge; can you make anything of it?"

Somers rested his arm on the pommel of his saddle and was quiet for some moments, searching the horizon with the powerful instrument.

"I think that's smoke, sir; but if it's them, they're a long way this side of where Andrews was killed."

"Very probably, very probably. They wouldn't stay there, surely. Advance at slow trot, and no unnecessary noise," MacDonald called to the men, and they went on again.

The long, narrow, shrubbed butte grew nearer and nearer; at last they reached it, but there was no sign of smoke or human being.

"Halt!" MacDonald dismounted.

"How far should you say that Andrews is from here?"

"About twenty miles, sir," Somers answered.

"Hm—m! And yet I know that I saw smoke or something very like it in this butte!" The officer turned.

"Michaels, take ten men, surround the brush from the far side, then line up at close intervals and drive it through!"

"Right, sir!"

"That ought to fetch 'em out if they're in there," MacDonald whispered to himself.

The eleven mounted men cantered off round the corner of the high undergrowth, and the rest sat waiting.

"How many——?" MacDonald began, when the crackling of a rifle and the dull bo-oom of a smooth bore interrupted him.

"They're in there, by Jove, they are!" he shouted then. "Steady now, men, steady, and if they break out, get after them sharply!"

Craaaaack! Bang! Bang! Bang-bang-pa-ang! Bo-o-oom!

The tension was supreme. Men strained to get into action, and it was a strain for MacDonald to hold them back.

"Quiet, men, quiet! Wait till the others get through; they'll have the devils right enough."

A silence followed his words; nothing but the wind whispered in the white ash and quivering birch leaves. Of a sudden every ear was turned eagerly.

"Give it to 'em, blast 'em, give 'em hell!" they heard faintly, and a cheer broke out.

"SILENCE, there!" Then, pang—bo-om, crang! and a far-away medley of yells.

From the thick brush the snapping and breaking of twigs sounded, and a single policeman galloped through.

Reining his horse to its haunches, he saluted MacDonald.

"Tims and Ryerson killed, Dickens and Audley wounded, three horses down, sir!"

"What in God's name is there in the butte?"

"Three Indians, sir, Almighty Voice and two others."

"That fiend again? We'll finish him this time! Nelson and two men go to relieve the wounded, the rest of you in open formation and close in on the butte; quickly now, quickly!"

Bang! A Constable rolled from his horse. The men flinched.

Bang! The nearest heard the store bullet whistle, but they set their teeth and waited.

Bang! MacDonald's jacket twitched near the elbow, and he saw a ragged tear. He thought rapidly, and grasped the only thing to do.

"Retreat steadily beyond that next rise!"

The lone gun spanged again and again, but missed each time. They fell back, taking the last wounded man with them, and halted under the cover of the hill.

"That devil knows we don't dare fire into him on account of our men on the other side, damn him!" MacDonald cursed bitterly. The shots died away, and from the butte came the remainder of the eleven men, bringing their dead. The waiting troop looked on sadly, growling vengeance. The Sergeant, Michaels, came up.

"Did you get them all but this one that has been potting us?"

"No, sir, didn't get nary one 't all!" the burly Irishman answered grimly. "Ye moight as wull look fur a nadle in a field o' hay as thry to git thim suckers outen that!"

It was getting dark rapidly, and the fact was obvious that it was merely a waste of life to try any more that night.

"Flint, return to barracks, report to the Commissioner, present my compliments and say that the field guns will be needed here unless we want to lose a lot of men. Ride hard, don't spare the horse. I want those guns here in the morning without fail; do you understand?"

"Right, sir!" The man swallowed some cold tea from his canteen, leaped into the saddle, and the sound of his horse's feet faded quickly away.

"Michaels, post sentries all round the butte with big fires; have each man keep out of the circle of his own fire-light, or they will snipe him, and have a sharp watch kept, or those —— things will slip out!"

"Yis, sor!" And it was done.

Suppers were eaten in whispering silence. The wounded men tossed and tumbled in their blankets, and beyond, in the shadows, two mute, stiff forms were lying, covered with their cloaks. MacDonald paced slowly up and down.

"This is excitement in the Northwest Mounted Police," he muttered; "not much like South Africa, but better than being under an uplifted commoner at barracks, anyway. I wonder if he will think it dignified to send those guns?" He strode on, traveling about the sentry line.

Crack! and he heard the hum-m-m-whe-e-e of the lead.

Several of the Police fired into the brush from whence the shot had come, and everything was still again.

An hour later, the men that had been sent out from barracks to get Andrews' body came, having heard the firing. The Constable had

not been mutilated; they put him beside the other two.

"If anything happens, call me," MacDonald ordered, as he wrapped himself in his blankets. He had scarcely lain down when he heard the sound of ponies' feet. An old squaw and a young Indian girl came into the light and dismounted silently.

"What do you want?" he asked, rising.

The old woman looked him squarely in the face, and her shining black eyes glowed in the yellow light.

"Me Tu-no-sin, mother to Almighty Voice. Me come see him die like his fadder, Big Chief," and she sat down. The girl said nothing. The near men grumbled and swore at the two, but they heeded not.

At last the night lifted and began to move, giving way to shafts of tinted light from the east. Little by little the butte grew in distinctness, till each bush and stunted tree was plainly visible. Nothing moved in it anywhere; only birds that fluttered audibly about in the morning quiet. Then came the sun, gilding the vast prairies in soft tone, banishing the dampness, mists and wreaths of hazy fog that swirled gen-

tly with the faint wind. The fires' glow was gone; only smoke curled upwards slowly. The men ate their breakfasts in turn, keeping steady watch the while on the inscrutable butte where death lurked silently.

"Can't we have a thry at 'em, sor?" Michaels begged, and the rest hung on MacDonald's answer.

"No; wait for the guns. I'm not going to have any more of you finished in there." The words were final, and the big Sergeant turned away.

In the middle of the butte was an open grass spot of a few yards' width. Something moving on it caught MacDonald's eye, and just as he distinguished what it was a wild, eerie scream quavered on the air. Every one looked, and two threw up their rifles.

"Wait!" and they put them down again.

The thing was a tall Indian, standing boldly out in the opening. As they watched he began to dance, and the sounds of a long-drawn minor chant floated in soft cadence over the brush.

The old squaw leaped to her feet.

"My son, he sing the Death Song of his great people; he no afraid."

The girl stood by her side, her eyes fixed on

the rhythmically swaying form. Tu-no-sin turned fiercely on the Police.

"You rabbits all! See him dance the Death Dance and you are 'fraid to go!" All the emotion of a wild, untamable race showed in her seared face as she cackled brokenly. The girl said nothing, but there was a fire in her eyes. The Sergeant lifted his hand to strike.

"No!" MacDonald said, quick and sharp.

They watched and waited. In a few moments the song was finished, and the Indian glided out of sight again.

MacDonald went up to the silent, patiently waiting women, who waited to see the end they knew was coming.

"Why do you stay?" he asked, a pity in his heart for them. The old squaw never even lifted her eyes to him. He asked again, then the girl spoke softly.

"Almighty Voice my chief, Tu-no-sin, young Eagle. We come to see him die like great brave and wake in the Manito land. He sleep here. We have no son, no chief, no moon, no star, when he is gone, and we come to see him go. Ogama* is not angry with poor Indians."

*White officer.

He swung on his heel abruptly, a lump in his throat.

"The guns are coming, they're coming, sir!"

In the distance a line was approaching fast; it came nearer, and they heard the rattle-clank-clank of the wheels, and the jingling of harness. Sweating and breathing hard, the line drew up. The Adjutant was at its head.

"What's all this nonsense about guns? Can't you get three Indians out of a butte without artillery?"

Bang! A gun-horse fell, kicking and struggling to rise.

"Unlimber! Load! Five hundred yards—No. 1 gun, Fire! No. 2 gun, six hundred yards—Fire! Too low, men, too low and to the left! Rake that thick stuff in that corner smartly! Ready! No. 1 gun, seven hundred yards—Fire! That's much better! No. 2 gun—Ready! Same range, Fire! Now keep at that for ten rounds, then work to the right! Sharply now, look sharp there, No. 2 gun!" So volleying his orders, the Adjutant dismounted, and noticed the women who stood close to the guns, watching the effect of each shot.

"Who's that, who's that?" he asked, fretfully, and MacDonald told him.

"Fools!" was his superior's answer.

"Now, gunners, sweep that high bank and clean out the foot of it. That's too low, damn it, too low! Get up in the air somewhere! That's it!" he shouted, as a shell burst fairly on the bank and the sand flew up in clouds.

The air was sultry and sullen with acid powder fumes, through which the sun came in thickened, dingy rays. An hour the firing continued.

"Cease firing!" and the bugle rang out clear and strong. The silence was great after the tumult.

"Cleaned up that place a bit!" and the Adjutant chuckled.

The brush was torn and gashed, scattered by the explosions; whole spots were swept bare, and here and there lone trees sagged weakly, trembling toward the ground. Long rifts showed through the high grasses where shells had hurtled along, and the sand banks were deep-pitted and jagged.

The two squaws stood there, impassively.

"Eight men in there to search! The rest outside in cordon formation!" MacDonald commanded the searching squad and the little party advanced, revolvers in hand, scrutinizing every shelter.

"Here's one of them, sir!"

"And here's the other two!"

There they were, the three, their guns in their hands, one of them evidently killed in the act of firing at the Police.

The squaws crept in, following the searchers. The mother sank on her knees beside her son, and stroked his face, smoothing the long black hair. The girl was on the other side, simply touching the dead man's hand. The bodies were near the outer edge of the butte.

"What shall I do with them, sir?" MacDonald called to the Adjutant.

"Leave the carrion there if they're dead, and come along; we've got to hurry to get these wounded men to barracks. Limber! Attach! Left wheel—TROT! Gallop!"

MacDonald put his hand on the woman's shoulder; she rose in fury.

"Go, White Ogama! We came to see braves die, not rabbits live!"

He called his men, arranged litters for the sufferers, then—

"Prepare to mount! MOUNT! Forward, TROT! Men with wounded follow slowly! Gallop!"

At the top of the last rise MacDonald stopped alone to look back. The smoke had all gone; nothing remained of the shelling but the wrecked butte.

"Poor devils," he whispered, as he thought of the two women alone with their dead.

He trotted on after his men, and all was silent again on the prairie.

The Light of a Match

The Light of a Match

WAVE upon wave in the wind, undulation on undulation, the wheat fields rippled their wealth. The glorious August sun heated the air with shimmering tenseness, baking the short grass on the wild lands, but urging on the feathered ears of grain to finer growth and proportion. Far away, like shreds of veils, faint clouds were scattered over the horizon, timidly reaching out overhead as though afraid of the scorching rays. The light hot wind that played along was laden with the smell of the grain, tainted with the green reek of the sloughs.

On the top of a rise was a squatter's home; rough and gray it looked in the fierce sunlight. A shed for the horses, an apology for a granary, a miserable coop for some chickens, completed the little group of buildings. Hysterically a hen cackled, announcing that rare thing on the Northwestern prairie, a fresh egg.

The clatter of a stool, a rush of footsteps, and

Samuel King tumbled helter-skelter from the low, fly-beset doorway.

"Marthy! Marthy!" he shouted, shrilly, his voice dying away on the instant in the burning atmosphere, "Susan's laid a egg fo' sure this time!"

Still cackling, the speckled hen retreated; he advancing eagerly to her nest under the stable sill.

"I got it, Marthy, I got it!"

Brown, oblong, and warm it lay in his rough palm.

"Thank ye, Susan." He drew the sweat from his forehead with a quick accustomed motion. The hen perched angrily on a plowshare and cackled on vociferously. Then from over in the corner of the yard a cock crowed its harsh tones, softened by the heat.

"Thank ye, too, Dick," old Sam said, gravely, and went back to the log house.

"Thar, girl! a right fresh egg I got fur ye!" He placed it carefully on the table.

The interior was small and neat; a bed, a table, three chairs, and a rusty stove were its only furnishings. Clothes dangled here and there from wooden pegs on the wall, worn boots

peered forlornly from beneath the attic ladder —nothing more. She looked up at him, eyes tremulous and pleading.

"It's so hot, Sam," she murmured, from her position by the crack of the north door. "It's so hot!"

"Aye, girl; but ye must eat! Ye hain't ate nothin' fur two days!"

She gave a quick, petulant motion.

"I don't want anything!"

With a deep sigh the old man sat down, while the blistering heat grew. He looked fondly and with great pride over the vast acres that belonged to him; acres that were heavy in weight, golden with dollars—money.

"Aye, money," he whispered; "money ter give her everythin' she wants, money ter make up ter her incause I'm old, money ter make her happy! An' it's all out thar, out thar; growin', fillin' ter twenty-five an' thirty dollars an acre; an', by God, it's fur her!"

"What *are* you muttering about, Sam?" the girl asked, tossing uncomfortably in the tiny breeze that came from the northwest.

"About you, girl; allus about you; I ain't got nawthin' else!"

She stood up wearily, smoothing her rough blouse and skirt, throwing back the loose damp masses of hair that clung about her face. She *was* beautiful, but the great hazel eyes had something unanswerable in them, something that no man could fully understand.

"It's frightful hot, Sam," she said, moving to him. "I'm choking—here!" She tore at her throat.

"Girl, girl; since yer father gi'en yer ter me as wife, I've loved ye all I knowed how. I'm only an old man, an' a rough one, but I'd—I'd"—he looked about in desperation—"I'd give up anythin' ye asked, ef et wuld make ye happy!"

"Dear old Sam," she whispered, "dear old Sam. I know ye would give me anything I wanted!" She turned from him impulsively and threw herself down by the north door again.

He jumped to his feet, the strong old figure alert and keen, his eyes bright, and flashing a strange gleam from beneath their shaggy brows.

"What d'ye want then? I giv's yer money, I giv's yer clo'es, I giv's yer my old life, an' I worships yer, girl; ain't that enough?"

She looked at him steadily for a moment, while the flies buzzed and sang, while the heat grew in its suffocating strength.

"Sammy," she spoke with an effort, almost forcing the words, "Sammy, I've loved yer like a"—she hesitated—"like a woman should; but I'm lonely!"

The old man looked at her; then turned away with an ineffable sadness in his eyes.

"Aye," he muttered, "she's lonely!"

Thus the afternoon passed in reeking, sweltering hours. Slowly the broiling sun sank into a scarlet west; degree by degree the air cooled until, with the shadows of evening, the atmosphere was less burning in its draught, less sweating in its grip.

"Girl!" He crawled beside her. "Girl!"

"Yes, Sammy." She woke from a welcome doze. "What?"

The old man fought with himself for an instant, then swallowed what he wanted to say. "Ye know I loves yer, don't ye?"

"Yes," she answered, slowly.

"Ye know I'd sell my soul fur ye; giv' up everythin' fur ye, ef ye asked it?"

"Ye-es," more slowly.

"What is't, then, ye's wantin'? Tell me, girl; tell me, an' I'll giv' it ye ef I can! I hain't got much, but what's mine's yours, Honey; what d'ye want?" The old man's voice was strong and clear; cracked a little with years perhaps, but ringing true.

She lifted herself on one elbow; reached out and stroked the long gray hair affectionately, kindly.

"Sammy, I shouldn't talk this way, I shouldn't; but a woman's just a woman, Sammy; ye can't always understand her ways, nor see the meanin' of her words; a woman's a cur'ous thing, Sammy!" She sank back slowly into the little draught that stole in under the north door.

"Aye, girl, but ye'r the only woman in the world; ye'r honest, ye'r squar' to me, an' I—I, by God," he burst into deep sobs that disturbed the quiet, "I'm only a rough old man!"

His sorrow appealed to her. She smoothed his wet forehead tenderly, and caressed the worn, gnarled hands.

"Never mind, Sammy, never mind; women don't know when they're well off, they're fools sometimes; that's Nature, Sammy."

"Natur'! What's Natur'?" he said, standing

up. "I loves ye, and ye know it; but I'm old and cain't go galivantin' round ter dances and sich, incause all the strength I got I want ter use in makin' money fur ye—out in the wheat." He waved his thin arms toward the doorway through which the stars now flickered and gleamed. "That's the Natur' I knows—the sun, rain, and frost; thar ain't no other, Marthy —is thar?"

Her great hazel-brown eyes opened wide in the semi-gloom.

"Poor old Sammy," she whispered softly; "poor old Sammy; always the wheat!"

Silently he went out to the stables and gravely milked their only cow, the warm white liquid hissing metallically in the tin pail. The odor of straw soothed, the smell of the animal body before him calmed his sorrow.

"Sho, Bess,"—he slapped the gaunt beast playfully—"ye'r gettin' shy o' milk; grass is p'utty stiff, ain't it?"

The cow looked at him over her shoulder and chewed her cud placidly.

"That's the only Natur' I knows," he muttered, as he went out into the hot night. "Onct!" —he drew himself up proudly in his old tattered

overalls, his faded blue shirt—"Onct, it seems as though I knowed somethin' different, but I've clean lost it!"

His eyes wandered over the dark landscape. Gray-black and far away the nearest rises in the prairie seemed stifling; the air came and went in his lungs; even his long gray beard dripped with the heat of his body. The darkness was laden with the invisible noises of the night; myriads of wings hummed as insects stung and flew away. Out yonder coyotes yelped, their doleful voices rising and falling as the draught breathed and died. Gophers whistled sharply at the entrances of their holes, piercing the blackness with sounds that tingled the ear. And over it all a sky spotted with stars that wavered in their gleam as he looked at them. The old man went and lighted a candle. By its flickering yellow sheen he saw the girl tossing by the north door. Hurriedly he poured some milk into a cracked coarse china cup.

"Here, Honey, have some o' this."

With half-opened eyes she took it and tasted, then flung it from her.

"Sammy!" she coughed; "I thought it was water."

He picked up the broken bits one by one and carefully threw them out of doors.

"I'll get ye some water," he said, quietly, and took down a bright bucket that shone faintly in the candle-light.

She started up quickly.

"Never mind, Sammy, it isn't worth four miles' walk."

But he was gone, and a breathless silence came on the interior, broken only by the buzzing of flies and flappings of moths toward the candle. She settled back to her old position, gasping for a cool whiff of air.

* * * * * *

A figure appeared in the door—tall, lithe, and strong, with steady blue eyes that had no furtive intention in them, even in the candle-light.

"Martha!" The voice was low, soft. "Martha!"

The girl sat up. "Here, Fred," she answered, quietly.

With light steps he reached her side, blowing out the candle as he passed.

"Martha!" He sought to kiss her.

"No, lad!" She pushed him away resolutely. "It can't be."

"Why, why?" the man begged, his tones vibrating with his great feelings.

A silence between the two—deep silence. Then, "Because he loves me, Fred; that's enough!"

"But he doesn't love you—he *can't*—as I do!"

"Ssssh!" she warned. "Even if he can't give me everything in the world, no one else has the right to, onless he says the word."

"I'll tell him, I'll show him how he can't, and he'll understand."

"No, Fred, you mustn't, because he's honest in his love; are you?"

She turned on him quickly.

"You know," he whispered, pressing her hand, "you know what I have resisted for you!" He stood up. "I'll come to-night for your answer, Martha—to-night."

Silence again.

A sultry hour and another passed on, she lying there battling with herself.

"Here's water, girl; fresh f'om th' river, but I'm afeared it's a trifle warm!"

She drank eagerly in great gulping swallows the tepid water that was in old Sam's bucket.

"It's not bad, Sammy," she murmured.

"I'm glad, Honey."

He sat on the door sill, slowly waving a kettle cover to and fro for a breeze. The night became darker and more dark, closing in over the prairies in sultry heaviness.

"I guess I'll turn in," he said presently, and stretched himself in some blankets near the empty stove.

"I'll stay here awhile," the girl said, and edged herself as near as possible to the north sill.

His heavy breathing was the only sound, while she listened and waited. Hot, hot and more choking the night was, threatening a thunderstorm or hail.

Sam King breathed hard because of his sorrow, because of his helplessness. And then he slept. As though in answer to his last waking thoughts, he heard a careful sound. He opened his eyes, and, silhouetted against the star-speckled heavens of the door, saw two figures. Their outlines were sharp against the sky. He almost cried out—but held his peace. No sound came from these two forms; no whisper of their meaning, but he guessed who was one

of them. They passed out, stopped again, and one lighted a match. No word aloud; only the look in their eyes at each other. The match died out instantly. The sound of careful feet coming in the hut, then silence.

Through the long hot hours he tossed and turned. "She keers fur me, but she don't love me," he whispered, great beads of sweat on his brow. "And how could she?—fool that I've been; I'm not suited for the likes of her; 'tain't Natur', an' I knows what she meaned this arternoon; I knows what she meaned."

On one side the jealousy of a one-time youth urged him to declare his knowledge and use his power of right; on the other the sense of justice to her made him helpless. He thought for a long time. "I'll do it—fur her," he whispered then. In a little while, when she was quiet, he stole out bareheaded, in his coarsely-stockinged feet, and walked slowly along the breast-high wheat.

"It was all fur her," he said aloud, mournfully, letting the nearly ripe ears slide roughly through his fingers. Careless of his steps, he wandered here and there through the tall growth. Stems cracked and broke, whole doz-

ens of stalks were bent and crushed, but he walked on. Then from far in the east crept the first green-yellow tints of dawn. He stood still and watched the colors change and brighten, brighten and change, till the lower heavens were aglow, then ablaze, with the coming sun.

He leaned over impulsively, and drew handfuls of the standing grain to his face, kissing it, rubbing it between the powerful old hands.

"I've watched ye grow, as I hev her; I've tended ye, as I hev her; I'd not let one wind o' heaven hurt ye, all fur her, if I c'uld help it; an' now"—he flung away the crumbled remains, his hands stained green—"now I've got ter giv' up to Natur' an' Life, as ye've got ter be cut with th' reaper!" His head sank on his chest, the long beard flowing low. "What for? Is there a God in heaven? What for?" He threw his arms toward the bright overhead.

The sun burst over the horizon in a fierce glare of power, gilding the vistas of wheat, empurpling the last clouds of night that vanished beyond the west, glowing the air with its might.

"Aye," he said, facing it, so that the light shone full on his face, softening the outlines of his figure. "Aye, thar's the answer, an' it's

true—*true,* it's Natur' in all her glory. What's laws, what's anythin' in life but Natur'?" He went back, bathed in the fierce rays. When nearly at the hut he stopped again.

The morning draught played daintily about him, rustling the grasses at his feet, stirring his beard and bushy eyebrows with gentle, caressing softness. As far as his eyes could reach were fields—acres—miles upon miles of gorgeous splendor of wealth. The ears of wheat rolled, rippled, bowed, and rolled again to the south wind, changing hue from brilliant yellow to shadowed green at each puff.

"It's all mine—*mine,*" he said, dully, "but what's the good? Money, aye; but money don't buy all I wish I culd giv' her, an' money don't buy what I want—an' can't have. Thar's no room in life for an old man like me. I've done my best, an' 'tain't good enough fur her; I knows it, an' she's right, bless her, allus she's right; I'm wrong, but I'll make it squar' to her, God helpin' me."

She awoke as he entered.

"Sammy?"

"Aye, Sammy," he answered, softly.

"Where've you been so early?"

"Just seein' that th' grain's all right."

"Is it?"

"Fur ye, girl, it's right an' growin', heapin' money with every day's sun."

She winced in half awakedness, shrinking from his earnest tones; and now he saw and was glad, for he had decided.

"A bit o' bacon?—some gruel for breakfast, girl?"

She put her hands over her eyes; they were clenched tight, and he saw now that he knew what to look for. With a strong heart he pretended that he did not see.

"Is it going to be hot again, Sammy?"

He went to the door, standing in the blistering light.

"I'm afeard so, Honey; but yon sun"—he looked almost straight into its white heat—"gives us money, gives us"—he stumbled in search of the word—"life!"

She murmured something, and dozed again while he got some breakfast.

* * * * * *

The reaping was over. The crowd of men had gone, and the vast fields no longer rang

with the whirring of steel, the harsh champing of toothed knives, the clattering chatter of binders. The year's work was done. No hail, no frost, nothing had marred the success of the crop, and the old man had a long credit account at the bank in Brandon. He and his two men, load by load, took the grain to the railway elevator, and watched it disappear in the dust-funnels. Then it was all gone. Instead of the waving wheat-heads on stalk he had money—gold, that he could draw from the bank, for it was his.

As he milked one night, he drew the bank-book from his inside pocket. It was already chafed with the continual carrying.

"Six thousand dollars," he whispered. "Six thousand dollars! I'll take two hundred; that'll get me far away some'ere an' leave enough for her an'—him!"

The same familiar cow gazed placidly at him, whisking her rough tail with a swi-sh—swi-sh—swi-sh that betokened annoyance of the flies. The next day he went, while the girl was sewing at his clothes, to the station.

"Gimme a ticket fur th' West."

"Whereabouts?" the agent asked, noting this

face more than the others that passed his little window.

"As far as the line goes," King answered, slowly.

The sound of tearing paper, the dull clack-click of a hand-stamp, then—

"Here ye are; all the way through British Columbia to the Pacific, $60.50!"

The old man paid his money unseeing, and turned away.

"Good for ten days only," the agent called after him.

For nine of these days he worked about the house, cleaning up, straightening the farm implements, getting everything right. That night, when the girl was asleep in the cold of the September frost, he went out, and paced the deserted fields, his feet crunching softly on the crust of the new earth. Glittering eerily, like distant winking eyes, the stars shone on him, and he watched the flashing comets trail their short, sparkling course. The darkness was intensely silent; not even a breath of wind disturbed the absolute peace.

"I'm goin' ter-morrow," he said aloud, "goin' so's she kin live. Girl, ef ye only knowed how

I loves yer! Honey——" His voice broke and quavered. "But I'm old, old, old—an' done! Great God,"—he flung his arms wide—"I loves her with a young heart, but I cain't show it. I'm too fond o' makin' money on th' land! What I *kin* do is to giv' her all I hev—an' go; an' I'm agoin'. Fred's a good lad, clean an' honest; an' since she loves *him,* since that's Life, I kin only show *my* love by this." He drew in great breaths of the night chill, and it strengthened him.

* * * * * *

"Come over to the station this mornin', Honey; I got business thar," he said, at breakfast.

She wondered then why he had on his best clothes, patched and worn as they were—but his best.

"Yes, Sammy, I'd like the drive, I think." She kissed him. "Nothing wrong?"

"No," he answered, steadily, "nuthin'!"

By a coincidence (that she did not know) Fred Halson joined them, riding his new cayuse, a pretty beast, full of life and deviltry.

"Whar ye bound, Sam?" he called gayly, looking at the girl.

"Over to th' station, lad; come along."

Once there, he fastened the team securely to a fence-post.

"I'll go to the store, Sammy," she said; "wait for me."

"*No,* don't, girl; I may want ye."

She was surprised; but stayed willingly.

"Sam," Fred shouted.

"What?"

"If thar's anythin' for me on th' express, take it home, will ye? I've got to go 'cross th' road." He started away.

"Fred!"

The young man stopped at the unusual command in the voice.

"Wait a minute, will ye? Train 'll be here p'utty soon, an' I may need ye."

"Oh, all right, Sam; *sure,* ef I kin be of any use."

They walked up the long platform together. The old man contrived to leave the girl and the other, while he went along the raised boards, his eyes focusing themselves on the long distance, to a certain roll in the cold prairie where he knew was his home. The skies were overcast and gray, chilling and repulsive. No faint

gleam of sunlight warmed his body, no ray of happiness soothed the agony in his heart.

"For th' last time I look on ye, my lands—hers and his'n *now*. But I'm content, incause she'll be happy!"

To-ot—to-ot, toot—toot. Far away yet, from the east, but plainly discernible, came the whistling of the express; and as he watched toward the sound he saw a thread of black rising over the prairie; furling, folding, and dwindling away.

"She's comin'," he whispered, and turned swiftly to the two that waited side by side.

"Girl!"

"You're sick, Sammy," she said, quickly, fearfully, seeing his haggard face and eyes dulled.

"I wants ter speak ter ye a minute."

She walked with him, the young man waiting.

"Thar's no use"—he coughed a moment as the rushing sound of iron wheels came to them —"thar's no use in tryin' ter pretend a girl like you can love a rough old man like me."

"Sammy!" she gasped, and stared in bewilderment.

"Thar's no good in it, girl; here"—he pulled

out his bank-book, and some papers—"here's your credit—now at th' bank, an' here's th' deeds o' th' land!" He forced them into her hands, hurrying on—"I'm goin', Honey, goin' out of your life, that I hain't no right to ruin."

She tried to interrupt.

"You've been squar' to th' old man, an' he kin appreciate THAT!" His words were drowned by the roar and rumble of the long train as it came slowly to a standstill beside them.

"Sammy!" she said, dully, the heroic thing he was doing for her numbing her mind.

He looked into her eyes for an instant, the whole of his great love twisting his face as though in pain.

"And me, Sammy? Without you——" She stopped, his sacrifice glaring into her soul. All his kindness and rough tenderness, all his little pathetic ways, all his honor and thoughtfulness, rushed past, and, woman-like, she weighed what she was losing, and what she might have in the future—torn between the two. "Why, Sammy? Why? Poor old Sammy!" she gasped, seeing the clinched jaws, the muscles working spasmodically in his face.

"Incause"—he spoke almost fiercely—"I saw it all by th' light o' a match."

She was silent, knowing then that *he* knew. He took her by the hand, dragged her through the crowd of tourists, passengers, immigrants, that thronged the station, to where the other stood.

"Fred, lad, ye'r honest, an' ye loves Marthy as a man should, don't ye?"

The other was amazed, dumb almost.

"I do!" he answered, before he had time to think.

"All aboard—all 'board!"

"I trusts her to ye, lad, fur she loves ye, an' kin show it now, incause I gives my consent, an' " —he coughed again harshly—"my blessin'. Look arter her well, lad, as I hev'; an' read this when I'm gone!" He gave him a sheet of paper, and sprang away.

Slowly the great wheels revolved to the spurting chug-chug of the engine. White-jacketed porters closed the vestibules of the Pullmans. Gradually, then faster and faster, the long cars moved away; the two gripping each other's hands convulsively, tears streaming down her face. No sign of old Sam King. The two

watched the express fade away to a blur in the west. She turned on him then.

"Are you a man like him, Fred?"

He looked into her eyes.

"He *is* a man," he whispered. "I can only try to love ye as he did!"

"You'll have to try hard!" she answered, softly.

For an instant then a single ray of yellow sunlight forced its way through the gray clouds, and hesitated weakly on the two; it was gone.

"Sammy"—she waved her hand to the westward, along the unsympathetic cold lines of steel—"ye didn't kiss me good-by," and the tears rolled faster.

"No, he didn't," the man whispered; "but I'll watch over ye! I don't love the grain *most!*"

He opened the paper, and his face became soft with a deep glow of feeling.

"Read thet, dear!"

She could distinguish the words but slowly for her tears.

"ye an fred kin marry in tou weks I'l be out o' th wurld then ye'l be hapy i gues an ets ryght ye shuld incaus ye an him hev bin squar in this thing i aint jelous i m hapy fur it

"lovinle

"SAM."

For a moment both were silent, looking to the west.

"He didn't love the grain most after all," Fred whispered, sadly.

"I don't think he did," she answered, and turned away.

THE END

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